PRESENTED TO THE LIBRARY
BY
Estate Harold M. Morgan



THE BRONZE STATUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FORREST.

Our tale opens in the month of July, 1435.

It was towards the close of a day which had been oppressively warm and sultry, that a solitary traveller, mounted on a powerful steed, was pursuing a rough and unbroken road that skirted the eastern side of a vast forest in Bohemia.

The radiant blush which the departing sun suffused over the western sky, was rapidly giving way to the increasing obscurity of the evening; and although the tops of the tallest trees—those giants of the vegetable kingdom—were still tinged with the ruddy glow, yet utter darkness already reigned within the wood, and sombre were the shades which the dense foliage threw upon the traveller's path.

The variegated richness and sparkling hues of floral coloring which in the daytime decked the border of the forest with a gorgeous garniture, were now invisible to the eye: for the flowers, having banqueted on the evening dew, folded up their leaves to join in that repose to which all inanimate nature was yielding.

Deep, solemn, and awe-inspiring was the silence that prevailed around—a stupendous stillness which seemed not to belong to the air itself, but to come as it were like a spell, from the black depths of that vast wood.

From time to time, however, there was a whirr of wings in the drowsy atmosphere, as some bird of night swept by in its impalpable path: or the scream of the owl burst on the traveller's startled ear;—or else the distant growl of the wolf made his steed wince and tremble till encouraged by the caressing hand of its master.

The evening deepened.

Overhead the branches shot forth at intervals in wild and fantastic forms; and in the lengthened shade which the wall of trees threw upon the ground, the shadows of man and horse were alike absorbed.

Sometimes the projecting boughs assumed in the imperfect light such singular and almost terrific shapes, that it appeared as if the stately oaks had become spectres of colossal size, stretching out their mighty arms to pluck the lonely traveller from his steed.

But little inclined to superstitious terrors was he: and while he is wending his way slowly along the broken road, and the shades of night are deepening around him, we will endeavor in a few words to convey an idea of his personal appearance.

His tall and well-knit form, though evincing great physical strength, was of admirable proportions and graceful symmetry: his bearing was noble and dignified;—and if his countenance, with its acquiline cast and the haughty curl of the short upper lip, bespoke a lofty pride, there was nevertheless a reassuring blandness in its smile, and the benevolence of a chivalrous disposition was expressed in every lineament. His fine blue eyes, flashing from beneath jetty lashes long and slightly curling like those of a woman, denoted a powerful intellect and a generous heart: and nothing could exceed the magnificence of that pale and elevated forehead, above which the dark brown hair was parted in wavy masses. The high arching of the brows took away from the severity of look which their deep pencilling would otherwise have occasioned; and although his features were strongly marked with the faultless Roman outline, yet so expressive were they of a noble mind and an honorable character,—so completely, too, did the light of intelligence and the animation of lofty feelings prevail over any grosser attribute,—that there was nothing sensual

515290

nor indicative of less estimable qualities in that face of perfect masculine beauty.

He wore no moustache; his whiskers, which were crisp, glossy, and naturally curling, met beneath his chin, upon which their growth was not however permitted to encroach in the shape of a beard. Thus his countenance formed a complete oval, the Olympian dignity and classical mien of which would have constituted a fine study for the sculptor or the painter.

The age of this distinguished cavalier was about seven-and-twenty. His attire was composed of good material, but was plain and unpretending in respect to ornament. A poniard and a sword, fastened to the belt that girt his waist, were his weapons of defence: the spurs that he wore upon the heels of his buff boots were of gold, indicating his rank to be at least that of knighthood, if not more elevated;—and a crimson plume waved gracefully from the front of his velvet cap.

Such was the traveller whom we find wending his way along the border of the vast Bohemian forest, while the shades of night were rapidly deepening around him.

It was evident that he was a complete stranger in this district: for from time to time he reined in his steed and swept his eyes over all the open part of the country which lay to his right; and when no glimmering of a lamp from some cottage window met his looks, he muttered to himself 'I was wrong to pursue my path without a guide. And perhaps I have mistaken my road altogether.'

Then, as he spurred his horse onward again, he would say, after a few moments' reflection, 'No—I have not wandered from the right path. The good peasant at the cottage where I last halted, directed me to keep the road skirting the border of the forest. But he must have miscalculated the distance—or I must have misunderstood him: for ere this, according to his statement, ought I to have reached the Castle of Altendorf.'

Again would he glance around to seek for some human habitation where he could either obtain fresh and accurate directions to guide him, or where he might repose until morning: but not a twinkling light broke through the deepening darkness; and the silver moon, rising above the trees, found the traveller still pursuing that apparently endless road.

Suddenly a piercing shriek came vibrating from the interior of the forest on his startled ear: and this was immediately followed by the sounds of men's voices, exchanging rapid observations, but the purport of which did not reach him—for although the sentences thus uttered were emphatic and ejaculatory, they were brief and subdued in tone. Then came another shriek, more stifled, as if a hand were placed over the mouth that gave vent to it; and there was a struggling amidst the trees at a short distance from the spot where the traveller had abruptly halted on hearing the first indication of female anguish.

To spring to the ground and fasten his horse by the bridle to a low projecting bough was the work of a moment with our traveller;—and, loosening his sword in its sheath, he dashed into the forest—taking the direction whence the screams and the voices had appeared to emanate. In a few minutes he heard the quick rustling of the foliage, and the sharp snapping of the small branches at a little distance; and following those evidences of the rapid passage of persons through the thickets of the wood, he suddenly encountered three men, bearing the inanimate form of a woman amongst them.

The moonbeams penetrated just sufficiently through the verdant canopy of the forest to enable the traveller to perceive this much;—but his own approach had not been overheard by the party of men, the rustling of the underwood caused by themselves having drowned that produced by his progress. Without an instant's hesitation, he sprang upon the foremost of the three and hurled him violently upon the ground, where he lay either dead or senseless;—ejaculations of terror instantly burst from the second, who, dropping the inanimate female, plunged into the depths of the forest and disappeared—doubtless imagining that there was a number of assailants springing to the rescue, instead of a single champion.

All this had taken place in a twentieth part of the time which has been occupied by us in describing it;—and the third individual, giving vent to a hasty but bitter imprecation against the cowardice of the fugitive, drew his sword and rushed upon the traveller. But scarcely had the blade glanced in the moonbeams across the eyes of the latter, when *his* weapon was likewise snatched from his sheath, and the two brands clashed together.

Our traveller labored under a disadvantage, inasmuch as the rays of the planet of night streamed full upon his own countenance and developed to the eyes of the other every movement that he made and every feint that he attempted; whereas his foe, shaded by the overhanging drapery of boughs, presented only a dark and ill-defined form, of whose features it was impossible to obtain a glimpse, and whose mode of fence and attack it was impossible to

follow. Nevertheless, our traveller, who was as skilful in handling his weapon as he was cool and courageous in combat, not only warded off all the blows and thrusts which were made at him by one who was assailing him as it were from the covert ambush of the deep shade, but eventually disarmed him. The sword which his enemy wielded was dashed from his hand; and the next moment the vanquished individual saved himself by a precipitate flight from any chastisement which the conqueror might have thought fit to inflict upon him.

Thus remaining master of the scene, our traveller returned his weapon to its sheath, and raised the inanimate female in his arms. She was still in a deep swoon; and for an instant her victorious champion feared that life was instinct. But, placing his hand upon her heart, he felt it throb gently: and at the same time her lips quivered slightly, as the silver moon now shone with all its power through the opening in the trees upon her countenance.

And, heavens! on what an angelic face did that pure flood of argentine splendor stream! It gave a living lustre to lineaments that were faultlessly beautiful, though now so marble pale;—and it displayed all the soft and flowing outlines of a form modelled to the most exquisite proportions. Her garb indicated that she belonged to the peasant class, so far as social position went: but, even in the rapid glance which the stranger threw over her as he held her in his arms, and statue-like as she was in the deep swoon which still continued, he saw enough to impress him with an idea of a loveliness utterly surpassing all the dreams of woman's charms which he had ever formed in the enthusiastic spring-tide of his youth.

But what was he to do to recover her?—where could he seek for water wherewith to moisten her alabaster brow? Bewildered and anguished--fearing that the spirit would ebb away for ever from its beauteous mortal tenement, ere needful succor could be afforded—the traveller threw his eyes around, penetrating with their eagle glances into the deep recesses of the forest. And, O joy! a flickering, glimmering light met his view: his straining orbs were fixed upon it, in terror lest it should prove a delusion: but, no—it was a light, stationary and appearing like the gleam of a lamp shining dimly through a cottage lattice.

Animated with hope that assistance might now be found, and in his excitement forgetting altogether the man whom he had felled and who still lay motionless upon the ground, the traveller bore his lovely burthen in the direction of the light, which every moment became stronger as he approached it; and in about five minutes he reached a large and comfortable-looking habitation, occupying an open space in the forest.

The hasty knock which he gave at the door, was immediately answered by an elderly woman of respectable appearance, who uttered an ejaculation of terror when the light streaming from within the cottage fell upon the marble countenance of the young female; and the stranger instantaneously perceived by her manner that his fair charge either belonged to the house or was well known there.

'Oh! Wildon, here is our Angela!' exclaimed the woman, clasping her hands. 'But, just heaven! is the dear girl dead, sir?' she demanded in a voice of anguish which bespoke the liveliest interest, if not maternal feelings, on behalf of the inanimate beauty.

'No—she will recover, with proper remedies,' answered the traveller, bearing his lovely burthen into the cottage, where a man, of benevolent appearance, and whose age might be about fifty, hastened forward from the inner room.

The elderly couple in turns embraced the lovely Angela, who now began to show signs of returning consciousness; and they bore her to that interior apartment which we have just mentioned.

During their temporary absence the traveller cast his eyes around the room in which they had left him; and everything denoted comfort and independence. The most scrupulous cleanliness characterised the dwelling; and the smoked hams and flitches suspended to the ceiling showed that the wild boar of the forest furnished the table of the inmates of that cottage with a plentiful and substantial food.

In a few minutes the man, whose name appeared to be Wildon, came forth from the inner room, and announced that Angela was fast recovering, but that as yet she had been unable to give any account of what had happened to her. The traveller thereupon narrated as much as he knew of her adventure, and the share which he had taken in it; and Wildon expressed his gratitude in the liveliest terms.

'I presume that the lovely Angela is your daughter?' said the stranger.

'She is not our child, good sir,' was the reply: 'but we love her as dearly as if she were. Half an hour ago she went out to fill her pitcher at the adjacent well—and those villains from whom you so generously rescued her, must have carried her off. We were growing uneasy at her prolonged absence; and indeed I was arming myself to hasten in search of her when you brought

her home. In her name and in our own, I renew the most heartfelt thanks.'

'Have you any idea who the wretches could have been that thus dared to maltreat her?' inquired the traveller.

'Not the remotest,' answered Wildon. 'But perhaps, when her mind is sufficiently composed to enable her to give us full particulars of the outrage, we may learn something on that score. Will it please you, worthy gentleman, to accept of such poor hospitality as this cottage may afford——'

'Ere I can decide upon your courteous proposal,' interrupted the stranger, 'I must ask to be informed how far distant is the Castle of Altendorf?'

'A matter of a league,' was the response. 'The road skirting the forest in that direction,' continued Wildon, pointing with his hand, 'leads straight up to the entrance.'

'And tell me, worthy peasant,' said the traveller, 'of what repute is the Baron of Altendorf? Does he bear a good name in his district?—for I opine that you are one of his vassals.'

'No, sir,' answered Wildon: 'This forest is upon the estate of the good and kind-hearted Count of Rosenberg, whose castle is situated about three leagues to the westward of my cottage. I am his head forest-keeper, and you may judge,' he added, casting his eyes feelingly and complacently around the comfortable room, 'that I serve a generous master.'

'Yes; I have heard favorable reports of the Count of Rosenberg,' said the traveller, in a musing tone; then, after a few instants' pause, he exclaimed, 'But the Baron of Altendorf bears not, I believe, an equally amiable character?'

'To speak frankly and candidly, good sir,' returned the man, 'I am unacquainted with any specific charge against his lordship of Altendorf. His vassals speak of him as cruel, severe, and tyrannical; and gossips whisper idle tales concerning him. 'Tis even said that strange sights are sometimes seen and supernatural sounds heard in the Castle: and true enough it is that the right wing of the building has been shut up for many years; indeed, as long as I can remember; and I have lived in this district since childhood. But if you ask me whether I know of any crime or evil deed which his lordship has ever committed, I say unhesitatingly nay.'

'You speak as an honest man,' exclaimed the traveller, who, in the frankness of his own generous nature, was well pleased with Wildon's ingenuousness. 'Has not this Baron a son?'

'The Lord Rodolph—a youth of about one-and-twenty,' answered the forest-keeper. 'He is a wild boy, and some say mischievous withal; but I myself have never had cause to complain of him. 'Tis true, he has no control over me: but, by the permission of my noble master, he hunts in this wood, and on those occasions I have seen him. If he be somewhat thoughtless and headstrong, 'tis perhaps because he has never known a mother's care since the first few months of his infancy.'

'A peasant, at whose cottage I rested myself awhile in the afternoon of this day, told me that the Baron's wife died suddenly, and even mysteriously, about twenty years ago,' observed the traveller.

'There was strange talk on the subject at the time,' answered Wildon; 'but I know not with how much truth. People shook their heads, and gossips whispered; but if there had been aught really wrong, the Count of Rosenberg would not have borne it tranquilly; for the late Baroness of Altendorf was his sister.'

'I see that you are not one of those who think evil of a man without having positive proof,' observed the traveller; 'and I admire your character. But while I am thus talking, my good steed which I left in the road is doubtless growing impatient. Touching, therefore, the kind and courteous invitation which you ere now gave me to partake of your hospitality, I am compelled to refuse it at present. My ultimate destination is Prague, where I hope to arrive within three days; and to-night I propose to rest beneath the roof of the Lord of Altendorf. Some weeks hence I shall be returning this way, when I will stop at your cottage for an hour and renew my acquaintance with you.'

'And on that occasion, which I shall look forward to with pleasure,' responded Wildon, 'our Angela will be enabled to thank you with her own lips for the signal service you have rendered her this evening.'

'By no sweeter lips in the universe can man be thanked,' said the traveller.

Then, having bade the honest peasant farewell, he plunged once more into the forest.

Remembering the direction which he had ere now taken, when bearing the beauteous Angela in his arms to the cottage, he found no difficulty in retracing his way; and, on passing the scene of his combat with one of her abducers, he bethought himself of the man whom he had first overthrown in the encounter. But after a strict search, he could perceive no trace of him; and he, therefore, concluded that the ruffian, being only stunned, had recovered his senses, and taken himself off.

The traveller accordingly hastened onward through the thicket into the road, where his steed was banquetting on the

rich herbage that bordered the forest; and, mounting the noble animal, he pursued his way in the direction of Altendorf Castle.

CHAPTER II.

LORD RODOLPH.

In about twenty minutes the lofty towers of the feudal fortalice began to stand out like shapely clouds, in the pure moonlight, against the deep purple sky; and by degrees, as the stranger approached them, they assumed the solemn and imposing form of a vast castellated structure. The summits of those huge masses of masonry shone with a greyish lustre, borrowed from the sweet planet of the night; but that appearance gradually deepened downwards in hue, until the lower portions of the stupendous edifice were revealed in an awe-inspiring and gloomy blackness.

The forest stretched completely up to the right wing of the building, a portion of which was thus embowered by the mighty oaks that seemed as capable of defying old Time as the gothic walls themselves; and from the central tower to that extremity which was so completely shrouded by the dense foliage, not a single light glimmered from the high, narrow, arched windows. But through many a lattice in the left wing and the adjacent structures the beams of lamps shone forth, displaying, instead of mitigating, the sombre aspect and prison-like gloom that invested the entire Castle, as it frowned in sullen grandeur high above the broad moat which glittered like a river of quicksilver in the powerful lustre of the moon.

The road grew less rugged and broken, and considerably wider, as it approached the draw-bridge, which lay like a deep black shadow across the pure stream; and on reaching the foot of the massive wooden viaduct, the traveller blew the horn that was suspended by a chain to a post. The wicket of the great gates was speedily opened; and a burly warder appeared on the threshold.

'Who art thou, worthy stranger?' demanded the menial.

'I crave hospitality until the morrow,' was the answer. 'Travelling for a special purpose, and on behalf of his Highness, Albert Duke of Austria, I am the bearer of credentials proving me to be a trusty messenger in the service of that Sovereign Prince.'

'The Baron of Altendorf is, at this present time, absent on a journey,' said the warder, in a respectful tone; 'but his noble son, the Lord Rodolph, will make you right welcome. By what name shall I introduce you to his presence?'

'I am called Sir Ernest de Colmar,' was the reply; 'and I won the golden spurs of knighthood in battle against the Turks.'

'Enter, Sir Ernest de Colmar!' exclaimed the warder, instantly throwing open the gates of the Castle; although, at the same time, he marvelled that a man of such rank and in the special service of the reigning Prince of the Duchy of Austria should travel unattended even by a single servitor.

'My two pages,' said the Knight, as he dismounted from his steed in the court-yard of the Castle, and making the present observation either because he divined what was passing in the man's thoughts, or because he felt that some excuse was necessary—'my two pages will be here before I take my departure in the morning. They have tarried behind me to execute certain commissions wherewith I had entrusted them.'

A groom, summoned by the warder, received the travel-wearied horse; and Sir Ernest was conducted into a spacious arched vestibule, lighted by a massive iron lamp suspended to the ceiling. At the farther extremity were the high and deeply-set gothic doors, evidently opening into the chapel: and on either side of the hall was a large staircase. The warder led the way up the flight communicating with that portion of the building which stood on the left of the huge central tower; and on reaching the landing, the Knight was escorted through several long passages, until his guide threw open a door, announcing, in a loud voice, 'Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

The apartment which the guest now entered was spacious, lofty, and furnished in a style of gloomy grandeur well befitting the general aspect of the ancient fortalice. Upon a table in the centre stood flagons of wine, drinking-cups, and several dishes of fruit; but no one was seated at the board: for the only occupant of the room at the time when the Knight was ushered in was a very young man, who seemed to be interrupted by this visit as he was pacing to and fro in an apparently agitated manner.

The moment, however, a guest was announced in the usual terms, he smoothed his ruffled brow, and, assuming a milder deportment, advanced to greet him. But the instant the light of the lamp, suspended to the ceiling, revealed to Lord Rodolph—for he it was—the countenance of the Knight, he started, turned pale, and appeared to be seized with a sudden paroxysm of mingled rage and surprise; then, recovering himself so promptly that this rapid excitement of

strange feelings passed unobserved by the guest, the young nobleman said in as courteous a voice as he could command, 'You are welcome, Sir Knight.'

'Your lordship will pardon me for this intrusion,' observed De Colmar: 'but I have ventured, although a perfect stranger even perhaps to my very name, to demand for a single night that hospitality which, under similar circumstances, is never refused at my own dwelling in ducal Austria.'

'Nor in our ancient Bohemia does the way-worn traveller seek an asylum in vain,' responded Rodolph. 'I regret that my father should not be here to entertain one of your degree; but he is at this moment on his way to Prague.'

'Whither I myself am bound,' added Sir Ernest. 'I have the honor to serve his Highness Albert of Austria; and I am travelling to the Bohemian capital on a secret and special errand. It will delight me if I can become the bearer of letter or message for your noble father, whom I shall doubtless meet in that city.'

'I thank you, Sir Knight,' said Rodolph; 'and although it is but a week since the Baron took his departure, I shall avail myself of your kindness to assure him of my health, and commend myself to his paternal recollections.'

The domestics now entered for the purpose of spreading the table with the evening repast; and while they were thus engaged, Rodolph and the Knight continued to discourse on various topics.

The only son and heir of the Baron of Altendorf was, as Wildon, the forest-keeper, had informed Sir Ernest de Colmar, about one-and-twenty years of age. He was tall, well made, and undeniably handsome; but, although his eyes were large, dark, and searching, and even fascinated the beholder with their extraordinary brilliancy, yet their expression was not agreeable. It would have been difficult, perhaps, to define in what they were thus unpleasant. Certain, however, it is that when they were fixed upon the countenance of another, they produced a sensation mysteriously painful, and engendered a species of disquiet in the mind.

His complexion was a clear olive, with scarlet lips, evincing a sensual disposition. His forehead was low, and his brows at times had a habit of contracting, as if care or heavy thought already weighed upon that youthful head. His hair was black as night—the least thing coarse—but curling naturally; and his teeth were perfectly even and of brilliant whiteness.

In manners he was somewhat reserved, distant, and haughty; to those beneath him he was invariably imperious, often despotic, and, if thwarted or angered, he would give way either to violent outbursts of passion, or shroud himself in savage sullenness. Vindictive in the extreme, he never pardoned, much less forgot, an injury; and to wreak his spite upon any one whom he considered to be his foe, he would summon to his aid the meanest resources of petty malignity. Possessing a remarkable power of controlling his feelings when such disguise suited his purpose, he was even enabled to assume an air of friendliness towards those against whom he inwardly cherished the bitterest rancor.

Such was Lord Rodolph, the only son and heir of the Baron of Altendorf.

Whatever were the cause that had produced so startling an effect on the young nobleman when he first caught sight of Sir Ernest de Colmar's features, certain it is that he now either thought no more of it, or else veiled it beneath a semblance of frank and open-hearted courtesy. Thus, while the dependants were arranging on the table the materials for a substantial repast, Lord Rodolph conversed with the Knight in a manner expressive of the most hospitable welcome and the most friendly courtesy.

The board was spread with all the solid luxuries worthy of a baronial mansion, and characteristic of those feudal times. The boar's head, the venison pasty, the huge round of spiced beef, the game pie, and the fresh-water fish, stewed in wine, were flanked with jugs of strong malt liquor and with flagons of the rich juice of the grape; and between the dishes of viands just enumerated were placed piles of the most delicious fruits of the country and the season.

Sir Ernest de Colmar's appetite had been sharpened by the long ride which followed a halt he had made in the afternoon at a peasant's cottage, where he had last refreshed himself; and he now did ample justice to the repast. Lord Rodolph, on the contrary, ate but little, and from time to time seemed pre-occupied with some dominating idea, the influence of which he could not altogether shake off; but when he thus found his mind sinking into a reverie, he aroused himself with an exertion, and did his best to entertain his visitor.

When a few cups of wine had been drunk, Rodolph rose from his seat, saying, 'Pardon my absence, Sir Knight, for a few minutes: I go to give the necessary orders that a suitable apartment be prepared to receive you, and that nothing be wanting to ensure your comfort.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar expressed his thanks, and Rodolph quitted the room,

beckoning one of the pages who waited at table to follow him.

Passing a little way down the long passage, Rodolph entered a small ante-chamber leading to his own suite of apartments; and, flinging himself into a large arm-chair, he said to the page, 'Hasten thou to the servants' hall, and bid Hubert, the steward, attend upon me here without delay.'

The boy bowed and retired; and in a few minutes an old man, whose hair was white with the snows of sixty winters, entered the room. His short, spare figure, was perfectly upright; and his step had lost little of the elasticity of a more youthful age. But his was one of those pale and slightly wrinkled countenances which furnish but a vague and uncertain index to the soul; for if there were something sinister in the glances of the small, sharp, restless grey eyes, there was also a certain benevolence about the lips; and if the brows were overhanging, and gave a sombre expression to the upper part of the face, the effect was counteracted by the placidity of the old man's smile. Then, again, his voice was soft, gentle, and rather melancholy in tone; and his manner was agreeable and courteous, without being degradingly servile.

'Hubert,' said Rodolph, the moment the steward made his appearance, 'you are aware that there is a guest at the Castle?'

'Is not your lordship satisfied with the fare which I ordered to be served up?' inquired Hubert, perceiving that there was something peculiar in his young master's tone and manner.

'Perfectly satisfied,' answered Rodolph. 'The supper was worthy of the hospitality of Altendorf, and I am anxious that this honored guest should be lodged for the night as handsomely as he has banquetted.'

'Assuredly, my lord,' responded Hubert, who fancied that he observed something like a lurking satire, if not a sheer malevolence, in the looks and words of the nobleman. 'I have given directions to prepare the Oaken Chamber for this worthy Knight who travels in the service of the great Albert of Austria.'

'The Oaken Chamber!' ejaculated Rodolph, affecting to be surprised at the arrangement thus made for the accommodation of his guest. 'How can you think of such a thing?'

'Is it not the best apartment now in use, my lord?' said Hubert, more and more surprised by his young master's language and manner.

'Yes, the best *now in use*, truly,' exclaimed Rodolph. 'But, look you, worthy Hubert: this Sir Ernest de Colmar is a messenger journeying on behalf of the Duke of Austria; and, although we have not the honor to be the subjects of that Prince, it nevertheless behoves us to treat and entertain the representative of his Highness in a fitting manner. How is it, then, that you have not thought of preparing the State Chamber for the use of Sir Ernest de Colmar?'

'The State Chamber, my lord!' repeated Hubert, a shudder passing rapidly through his frame, and sudden horror glaring in his eyes: then, instantly composing himself, he said, 'But your lordship only jests with me.'

'I am in no jesting humor,' answered the young nobleman, sternly. ''Tis true that the State Chamber is in the right wing of the Castle; true, also, that the apartments in that portion of the building have been shut up for many long years——'

'And true, likewise,' added Hubert, solemnly, 'that your noble father would never forgive your lordship or myself if we were to lodge the Knight *there*!'

'I am not sure that the Baron would be so angry as your words imply, Hubert,' returned Rodolph 'At all events, I am lord and master here during his absence; and what it suits my will and pleasure to do, *that* I will perform. Report says that the right wing of the Castle is haunted; but I, for one, put no faith in such idle rumors. However, we will this night clear up the mystery. Accident has thrown in our way a gallant warrior, who, being a total stranger in these parts, cannot have heard aught of that silly gossip—and, to all appearance, he is a man who will face an evil spirit as readily as a foeman in fair combat. It is my command, therefore,' continued the young nobleman, in a stern and imperious voice, 'that the State Chamber be prepared for his accommodation. If he pass the night unmolested, will not the lie be given to the foul scandal current in regard to the finest portion of this castellated mansion, which will one day be mine?—and if it be thus disproved that the right wing is visited by the troubled spirits of the dead, my father will rejoice at the result of the ordeal, and will throw open those apartments once more.'

'My lord,' said Hubert, in a faint and tremulous tone, 'I implore you not to take this rash—this inconsiderate step! Your noble father has doubtless good reason——'

'To believe the silly tales that gossips recite!' exclaimed Rodolph, starting angrily from his seat. 'Then, if it be so, the more imperiously does it become his son to clear up th mystery in his absence. Hubert,' added the nobleman, fixing his keen dark eyes menacingly upon the old steward, who

trembled from head to foot, 'either obey without another remonstrance the orders which I have given you, or else confess that you know more of those apartments and the legends belonging to them than I can as yet suspect or imagine.'

'Your lordship shall be obeyed,' answered Hubert, in a tone that was scarcely audible; 'and the State Chamber shall be prepared forthwith.'

'Good!' exclaimed Lord Rodolph; and without another word, he quitted the room, hastening back to the apartment in which he had left Sir Ernest de Colmar.

Apologizing to the Knight for his protracted absence, he instantly took up the conversation at that topic which they were previously discussing; and he studiously, but apparently with an unrestrained ease, made himself so agreeable that Sir Ernest became greatly prepossessed in his favor.—A few more goblets of wine were drunk; and thus another hour was whiled away as if it were only a few minutes.

It was now midnight; and Lord Rodolph, rising from his seat, proposed to conduct his guest to the apartment prepared for his accommodation. A page was summoned; and the boy, bearing a lamp in his hand, led the way through a complete labyrinth of corridors, the nobleman and the knight following and conversing as they thus walked together.

At length they reached the end of a passage, where Hubert stood on the threshold of a massive door, which was open.—He also carried a lamp, the light of which fell upon his countenance, rendering it almost ghastly in its ashy paleness; and he threw a rapid but beseeching glance upon Rodolph, as if to implore him to alter his mind even yet. The young nobleman, however, affected not to catch that look of entreaty; but, dismissing the page, bade the steward proceed with the light.

The party now entered a little ante-chamber, or vestibule; and on the farther side Hubert flung open a door. They then passed into a small room, the atmosphere of which was laden with perfume that exhaled from Turkish pastiles burning in a silver censer; and Rodolph instantly comprehended that this had been done by Hubert to neutralize the damp and disagreeable odor which necessarily prevailed in a place so long shut up and uninhabited.—The furniture in this room was massive and of a very antique fashion; but it had been hastily dusted and cleansed, and cushions from another apartment had been substituted for the old ones which had rotted on the seats of the chairs.

Traversing this ante-chamber, Hubert led the way into a spacious apartment, which had likewise been furbished up as well as the short interval allowed for the purpose would permit. Fresh drapery, and the mattresses and clean linen for the bed—cushions for the chairs—a large velvet cloth spread on the floor—a neatly arranged toilet-table—and several ornaments placed on the massive mantel, which projected at least three feet from the wall—these were the principal changes and arrangements made to give an air of comfort to the State Chamber; and as the perfume of the pastiles penetrated from the adjoining room, the atmosphere was completely imbued with that powerful odor.

Hubert placed the lamp upon the table—bowed, and retired; but as he crossed the threshold, the deep sigh which rose from his bosom fell upon Rodolph's ear. The young nobleman had however gone too far to retract, even if he were thus inclined: and wishing his guest a good night's repose, he departed to his own chamber.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIES OF ALTENDORF CASTLE.

When thus left alone, Sir Ernest de Colmar was about to lay aside his apparel and seek the slumber which he so much needed after his long journey; but it suddenly struck him, as he glanced around, that the apartment wore a most sombre, gloomy, and antiquated aspect, in spite of the varied arrangements which we have already mentioned, and which were intended to give it an air of comfort. At the same instant he remembered that the room must be situated at a very considerable distance from that portion of the building in which he had passed the evening with Lord Rodolph; and several appearances which now met his eyes, served to convince him that the chamber had long been disused, and had undergone certain hasty improvements for the present occasion.

For the walls were hung with tapestry, which in many places was in perfect rags: the floor had rotted in several parts, and gave way to the tread of the feet:—the ceiling, although it had been well swept, was discolored with the damp and broken in at one of the corners; and the furniture, though heavy and massive, was ricketty at the joints and worm-eaten almost to utter decay.

Wondering that he should have been consigned to such an apartment, the grandeur of the saloon where he had supped with Rodolph having given promise of corresponding comfort and accommodation in the

other rooms of the Castle, Sir Ernest de Colmar was induced by curiosity to take a closer survey of his chamber. Raising the tapestry, he found that it actually crumbled like scorched rags in his hands, leaving nevertheless a clammy sensation of slimy dampness; and an inspection of the wainscotting behind showed him how dilapidated all that wood-work had become. Currents of air poured through the gaping panels, which in many parts were green with a fetid moisture, and in others were black with acccumulated dust.

Suddenly a reminiscence flashed to his mind. Had not Wildon the forest-keeper informed him that the right wing of Altendorf Castle had been shut up for many years?—and did not this apartment bear every indication of one which long disuse had consigned to the ravages of decay?

Startled by these reflections, and determined to clear up all doubt as to the point which they involved, Sir Ernest approached one of the windows, which, having been hastily cleansed, were besmeared with the dirt that there was not time to wash away thoroughly. The casement to which he thus advanced, was consequently so obscured that he could see nothing outside: but, after some trouble, and by the assistance of his poniard in removing the well rusted fastening, he was enabled to open it.

The night was one of continued moon-lit splendor; and the moat gave back to the deep purple sky the silver lustre and the image of the chaste queen of heaven.

But all uncertainty as to the position of De Colmar's chamber was cleared up in a moment; for, as he gazed forth from the window, the bridge communicating with the entrance under the central tower was on the *left*; and he was therefore in the *right* wing of the castle!

Moreover, at a short distance on his right hand, the forest-trees stretched close up to the edifice in that direction; and thus had he succeeded in satisfying himself that he was really an inmate of the very portion of the building where strange sights were said to have been viewed and preternatural noises heard.

For an instant a cold and mysterious tremor crept over Sir Ernest: but drawing himself proudly up to his full height, and shaking off the superstitious awe that had begun to steal into his breast, he exclaimed aloud, 'This feeling is unworthy of me! God renders not the night hideous and terrible to the innocent!'

And he was about to close the casement, when he suddenly caught a glimpse of something white moving slowly amidst the trees that stretched towards the extremity of the right wing of the Castle.

Again did a chill pass over him: and, rooted to the spot, he kept his eyes fixed upon that object—or rather followed it with his looks as it passed gradually on through the maze of foliage, deeper into the forest. It appeared to proceed with measured steps—never once halting, nor turning aside, nor accelerating its pace: like a spectre did it seem to move slowly amidst the trees—until it suddenly vanished, as if the earth had swallowed it up, or as if it had melted all in a moment into thin air.

The Knight stood gazing for nearly a minute upon the spot where it had thus disappeared; and when, with a start, he turned aside from the window, he felt that he was perspiring at every pore.

In a battle a braver man than Sir Ernest de Colmar never couched lance; and this was the first time in his life that he had experienced the influence of superstitious awe. But he could not conceal from himself that the object he had just seen had for the time unnerved him—had drenched his brow with the big drops of terror—and had caused his ample chest to remain upheaved with the suspended breath.

But now, with a cheek flushing through indignation at having given away to that mysterious awe, the Knight closed the casement and resolved to seek his couch. First, however, he visited the adjacent chamber, in order to extinguish the pastiles, the perfume of which was overpowering; and, having done this, he passed into the vestibule to assure himself that the door leading into the passage was closed. He found that it was shut; and he drew the rusty bolts to make it secure—for the circumstance of Lord Rodolph having consigned him to that long unoccupied portion of the building, had created in his breast vague suspicions that some treachery might be meditated, though for what purpose he was at a loss to conceive.

He was retracing his steps into the sleeping-chamber, when it struck him that he would only be acting with the proper precaution if he were to ascertain whether there were any other mode of entrance into his suite of apartments, besides the outer door which he had just fastened. Having the lamp in his hand, he carefully examined the vestibule, which was surrounded with the wainscotting, and decayed and crumbling. Thrusting his poinard in various places through the broken wood-work, he encountered the solid wall only; and thus far satisfied, he passed into the middle chamber. This room was likewise wainscotted; and here again the point of the weapon was resisted by the masonry behind the panels, on each occasion that the Knight sounded the depths of the fis-

sures which Time had made in the carved wood-work. No secret door, therefore, appeared to exist in either the vestibule of this room.

Sir Ernest de Colmar now re-entered the large, sombre, and dilapidated sleeping-chamber; and, raising the tapestry, he used his dagger on the wainscot in the same way as he had done in the other apartments. The result was equally satisfactory so far as he pursued his investigation; but he knew not how to deal with that portion of the wall against in which the bed-tead stood.

For the head of the couch was of thick carved oak, rising almost to the cealing, and forming at the top of the canopy whence the drapery had descended.

But being resolved not to leave a single precaution unadopted, in case treachery should be intended, Sir Ernest succeeded, by dint of all his strength, in moving away the bedstead in such a manner that he could pass behind the solid head; and, lifting the tapestry, he thrust his poinard through several fissures in the wainscot. At first the weapon encountered only the wall: but at last its point entered something made of wood.

The Knight fetched the lamp from the table where he had deposited it, and commenced a keen scrutiny of the wainscot. In a few moments he discovered a small round piece of iron set in the corner of a panel, and having the appearance of the head of a nail. Suspecting that it might have connexion with a secret spring, he pressed it hard with his thumbs; and the panel gave way, opening towards him to a distance of two or three inches.

Had not the hinges been eaten with rust and clogged with dirt, the panel would have doubtless flown wide open by the mere force of the spring which thus set it free.

However, De Colmar easily opened it; and the aperture, which was five feet high, and two and a half in width, revealed a door of similar size set in the solid masonry.

With a strange and mysterious presentiment that he was about to fathom some wild and romantic secret bearing reference to the *right wing* of the Castle of Altendorf,—and beginning to put some faith in the rumors which appeared to be current concerning that part of the old feudal structure,—though more than ever bewildered in respect to the motives which could have induced Lord Rodolph to lodge him in that chamber,—Sir Ernest de Colmar now examined this inner door with a rigid scrutiny. But as it was covered with the mildew of damp, he tore off a piece of the rotting tapestry, and therewith cleaned it somewhat. The result of this proceeding was the discovery of a small object shaped like the head of a nail, and resembling that which he had found in the panel.

By pressing hard upon the iron, the door gave way—and the Knight thrust it completely open: but so powerful a current of air immediately rushed from the aperture, that his lamp was nearly extinguished. He however shaded the light with his hand in time to save it; and, waiting till the gust had subdued, he continued his survey of the place.

The open door revealed the head of a flight of steps which Sir Ernest unhesitatingly began to descend. The steps were of stone; and, although slippery with the damp, they were firm and solid in their setting. Protecting the lamp, the Knight passed gradually down to a considerable distance: when he found his way suddenly barred by a door. This however yielded, on the bolt that held it being drawn back; and Sir Ernest now continued his way along a vaulted passage, very narrow and so low that he was compelled to stoop his head.

The sides, the arching roof, and the floor were of solid masonry;—and when Sir Ernest calculated the direction in which this tomb-like passage ran, on considering it in reference to the position of the flight of stone steps which he had descended, he felt certain that it must have been formed in the thick wall overlooking the moat.

Carefully shading his lamp, and proceeding with caution, the Knight advanced about a hundred paces, when he was abruptly stopped by a dead wall which seemed to arrest his progress altogether. But in another moment he became aware that the passage merely turned off suddenly to the right; and he pursued his way till he reached another door. This he opened without much difficulty; and he found that it led to a second flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which there was another long arched passage.

Once more was his lamp nearly extinguished by a gust of wind, which came sweeping from the farther extremity of the vaulted corridor; and again did he succeed in saving the light. A distance of about a hundred paces brought him to a small circular chamber, looking like a cavern hollowed in a solid rock, so rugged and massive was the masonry. A stone crucifix, about three feet high, stood in a long niche; and on the pavement beneath, there was a block of granite, roughly shaped like the hassock on which the penitents kneel in churches.

Facing the entrance from the passage

there was a door, which yielded to the Knight's hand as the former ones had done; and he now entered an apartment, which at the first glimpse was evidently high and spacious—for the lamp was not powerful enough to throw its light to the farther extremity. Advancing slowly and with caution. Sir Ernest perceived that the place was as rude in its structure as the passages through which he had passed. The walls were green and the pavement was slippery with the damp: there were no windows nor even loop-holes; and it appeared certain that this room of stone could never have been intended for a human occupant.

Unless, indeed, the unfortunate victims of feudal tyranny were doomed to drag out there the remainder of their wretched lives, and to pray before the crucifix, while kneeling on the granite block, in the circular chamber, for that mercy from heaven which man refused to accord!

Scarcely had Sir Ernest de Colmar made this reflection, when he started abruptly, and grasping the lamp in his left hand, laid the right upon his sword.

For at the further extremity of the room, a colossal form in human shape seemed slowly to stand forth out of the darkness—such being the effect produced by the lustre of the lamp gradually bringing the object within its scope as the Knight advanced.

This circumstance was almost instantly comprehended by Sir Ernest, who now perceived that the figure which had startled him was motionless;—and, withdrawing his hand from his sword, he approached the cause of his evanescent terror.

The nearer he drew, the deeper became his astonishment at what he saw. For it was a colossal statue of a female on which the light fell with increasing power as he advanced; and a still closer view convinced him that it was a representation of the Virgin.

Upwards of seven feet in height—elevated upon the pedestal—but sustained on the massive basis formed by its own widely flowing robes, that wondrous specimen of art at first amazed the Knight: but this feeling soon yielded to the softer one of pleasure, as his eye gradually made him acquainted with the details of the statue's features and form.

The head was of the most dignified beauty, the countenance, slightly bent downwards as if in silent prayer, wore a look of touching melancholy, the effect of which was enhanced by the arms being meekly folded across the bosom. The figure, although represented as being completely enveloped by the robe in which the Madonna is usually depicted, was full of grace; and none of the soft impressions thus conveyed tu the mind of the beholder; were marred by the gigantic stature or the colossal proportions of the image.

The material of which it was modelled appeared to be iron finely bronzed; and although thus buried as it were—thus hidden from the world's eye—in a room where the walls were green with the damp and the pavement slimmy with the same noxious moisture, not a speck of rust was visible about the statue: on the contrary, it shone in the lamplight with the subdued lustre of burnished gold.

Long and intently did the Knight gaze upon it.

We have already observed that his first sentiment was one of amazement—his next of pleasure: and this latter yielded in its turn to an emotion of reverence. All these feelings, one after the other, prevented him from touching the image—from even approaching too near it. Deeply imbued with religious convictions, and a true believer in the Catholic faith, Sir Ernest de Colmar would not for worlds have laid a finger upon that statue. There was something so sublime, and yet so touching—so profoundly awe-inspiring, and yet so full of a holy interest, in the entire conception of this Madonna, that even as he walked slowly around it he trod softly and reverently, as if any haste or excitement were a desecration.

Under the influence of feelings such as these,—pure and noble feelings, and not a debasing bigotry nor a mere blind idolatry of the statue itself,—but regarding it as the effigy of the Blessed Virgin,—Sir Ernest de Colmar bowed his head before the splendid image, and put up a silent but not the less fervent, prayer to heaven: then, having thus proffered the incense of his soul's adoration, he tore himself away with reluctance from a specimen of art which he would fain have lingered for hours to contemplate.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HORRORS OF ALTENDOLF CASTLE.

Sir Ernest de Colmar was retracing his way across the Chamber of the Statue towards the circular room, when the light of the lamp which he carried in his hand revealed to his eyes a small door that had hitherto escaped his observation.

Resolved to pursue his researches so long as any fresh feature of the place remained to be investigated, the Knight drew back the massive bolts—opened the door—and at the end of a short, low, and narrow pas-

sage, found himself in a room of moderate dimensions, into which the fresh air was admitted by a loop-hole looking on the moat of the Castle.

Upon a table in this room were various implements, jars containing liquids, and other articles, the uses of which Sir Ernest could not immediately comprehend: but on perceiving that there was a furnace at one extremity of the place, and on re-considering the nature of the tools scattered on the board, he became convinced that this was the workshop where the necessary chemical preparations were compounded for polishing the statue and renovating its glossy bronze surface as occasion might require.

Indeed, a closer inspection proved that the furnace had been recently lighted—at all events, within the last few days; and thus did it become evident that these mysterious apartments were not entirely shut up against every human being, but that they were periodically visited by some one having charge of the statue.

Yet for what earthly purpose was such care bestowed upon that statue? If it were thus highly valued, wherefore was it concealed in so strange a place?—why was it buried in such sombre obscurity? Surely the possessor of such a glorious work of art ought to have displayed it in some conspicuous part of the baronial mansion, where it would delight the eyes of all visitors and friends! It appeared to Sir Ernest a positive sacrilege and desecration to consign so perfect an image of the Madonna to that disused chamber, instead of permitting it to grace the Castle chapel of the grand entrance-hall.

Besides, by leaving it in a room where such corroding damps prevailed, it seemed to be wantonly creating unnecessary trouble and toil for the person or persons entrusted with the care of the statue; and there was moreover a marvellous and unaccountable inconsistency in bestowing any attention at all upon an object thus sedulously veiled in the gloom of a dungeon.

Such were the reflections that passed rapidly through the mind of Sir Ernest de Colmar as he surveyed the various implements evidently used in burnishing and renovating the surface of the Bronze Statue. But his attention was speedily directed towards a door set in a deep recess in one corner of the workshop; and, having opened it without difficulty, he found that it communicated with a steep flight of stone steps.

These Sir Ernest unhesitatingly descended, shading the lamp with his hand; and at the bottom of the stairs, he entered a narrow passage which he knew by its depth must be below the level of the moat. But the fresh air poured down from the work shop above; and as the Knight advanced, the gentle rippling of water met his ears.

At the extremity of the stone-ribbed passage a low arch-way, without a door, admitted Sir Ernest into a small vaulted chamber, which was however exceedingly lofty.

But most singular was the spectacle that here encountered his eyes!

Six vast wooden cylinders were arranged in pairs, parallel to each other, and extending almost entirely across the room. At one end the axles on which these cylinders were suspended, fitted into the rugged wall: at the other extremity, they were supported by massive upright posts or jambs. The uppermost pair of cylinders had a greater interval between them than the middle pair; and the third or lowest pair, were closer still. Upon these cylinders innumerable iron blades were fastened, projecting into the face of the other, so that they crossed scissors-wise.

At the extremity of each of the three cylinders on one side, there was a coil of rope wound round as on the drum belonging to a clock; and the end of these three ropes, passing through a common hole in an adjacent post, sustained a heavy weight. It was therefore clear that this infernal machinery was intended to be put in motion by some means which were not however apparent, but that, when once set going, the movement would be prolonged by the weight until the coils of the rope should be completely unwound

Immediately above the mechanism, which reached almost to the top of the stone chamber, there was a trap-door set in the vaulted roof; and beneath the machinery murmured a deep stream of water—flowing from a low arch in the wall at one extremity of the chamber, and through another arch at the opposite end.

Such were the features of this subterranean room—the awfully misterious spectacle that gradually developed all its sinister details to the amazed and bewildered looks of Sir Ernest de Colmar!

In spite of his dauntless courage—in spite of that magnanimity of disposition which knew not what danger was, he felt a cold shudder steal over him—an icy tremor that wound its snake-like folds around his form, as if a clammy serpent were creeping between his garments and his flesh.

The sensation was horrible—horrible; and Sir Ernest, turning abruptly away from the contemplation of that diabolical machinery, threaded the passage, and ascended the stone stairs with a rapid step, as if every

moment he fancied some hand would clutch him from behind!

On gaining the workshop, as we may denominate the chamber where the implements were scattered on the table, the fresh air from the loop-hole fanned his countenance and seemed to steady his excited brain. Then it struck him that he would leave behind no traces of his visit to these scenes of mystery; and he accordingly closed and bolted the door through which he had just passed. Returning into the Chamber of the Statue, he cast one long and reverential look upon that exquisite work of art; and, crossing himself piously, he hastened from its mystic presence.

Traversing the circular room, Sir Ernest pursued his path along the passage which he had ere now threaded, carefully closing all the doors behind him. At length he regained his own chamber in safety; and, having fastened the panel in the wainscotting, he replaced the heavy bedstead in its original position.

Overcome with weariness, the Knight threw off his garments and lay himself down to rest. But sleep did not instantaneously visit his eyes. The statue—the white figure which he had beheld moving through the adjacent forest—all these haunted his imagination;—and he likewise wondered over and over again wherefore Lord Rodolph should have consigned him to that suite of apartments which communicated with the mysteries of the Castle.

At length a feverish and uneasy slumber stole over him;—but his dreams aggravated into the most terrible forms and appearances all the strange and unaccountable things which he had seen ere retiring to rest.

He awoke with a sudden start: the beams of a glorious morning poured through the casement;—and, smiling at the phantasms from which he had thus awakened, he sprang from his couch.

The Knight was in the midst of his toilette, when a knock at the outer door of the vestibule met his ears. He hastened to open it; and the venerable looking Hubert appeared upon the threshold.

'May I hope that your Excellency has slept well?' inquired the steward; and it struck the Knight that the old man surveyed him with a peculiar look.

'Oh! never better,' answered Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a cheerful tone; for he did not care to betray, either by his words or his aspect, that he had experienced anything extraordinary during the night.

'I am charmed to hear it,' exclaimed the old steward, his countenance brightening up. 'Your Excellency's two pages have arrived,' he continued: 'one reached the Castle before daybreak—and the other within the last quarter of an hour. They came not therefore together——

'No,' interrupted Sir Ernest: 'they have been dispatched on different errands and in opposite directions. Have the kindness to show them to me forthwith.'

Hubert bowed and retired; and soon afterwards two remarkably handsome youths, each about nineteen years of age, hastened into the presence of their master.

'What tidings, my brave and faithful boys?' demanded Sir Ernest, as soon as he had received their greetings with an affable yet dignified manner. 'Speak you first, Lionel,' he added, turning to one who was slightly taller than the other.

'I have learnt,' responded the youth, in a tone of the deepest respect, 'that the terrible Zitzka is encamped at the distance of about a day's journey from this Castle.'

'Good! We will visit him on our route to Prague,' observed the Knight: then addressing himself to the other page, he said, 'And you, my trusty Konrad—what intelligence have you for my ears?'

'I succeeded, according to the directions which you gave me, in discovering the grotto inhabited by the holy Father Cyprian,' replied Konrad; 'and the good monk will join your Excellency at mid-day. The place of meeting is a spot where a small chapel stands, about three leagues from Altendorf Castle, on the highroad to Prague.'

'You have both accomplished your duties well, good youths,' said the Knight. 'See that our steeds are in readiness by the time I have paid my respects to Lord Rodolph and eaten a mouthful to break my fast.'

The pages retired; and Sir Ernest de Colmar having completed his toilette, issued from the suite of apartments. In the passage upon which the vestibule opened, Hubert was waiting to escort him to the room where the morning meal was spread, and where Lord Rodolph was expecting his guest.

Subduing any feelings of anger which he might have experienced at the indignity involved in the circumstance of his consignment to the disused chamber, Sir Ernest greeted the young nobleman with a cheerful air; and to a question that was pointedly put to him, he replied that he had never slept better in his life. That he had been lodged in the right wing of the Castle for some mysterious purpose or another, he now felt convinced: but his pride would not permit him to afford any indication that he was aware of this uncourteous proceeding.

Having partaken of the repast, Sir Ernest rose; and thanking Rodolph for his hospitality as cordially as if there were re-

ally nothing to complain of, he said, 'Has your lordship any message or letter for the Baron of Altendorf?'

'I am disposed to avail myself, Sir Knight, of your kindness,' responded the young nobleman, placing a small sealed packet in his hand.

'It shall be delivered faithfully,' observed Sir Ernest, securing it about his person.

Then, taking his leave of Lord Rodolph, the Knight descended to the court-yard, where he mounted his horse; and, followed by the two pages—each bestriding a spirited steed—Sir Ernest de Colmar rode slowly across the drawbridge of Altendorf Castle.

CHAPTER V

THE CARTHUSIAN PRIEST.

The noon-day sun was cloudless in the azure sky, when Sir Ernest de Colmar, attended by his pages, reached a point where a narrower pathway intersected the broad road stretching on to the Bohemian capital. At this spot there stood a small chapel—a mere hut, rudely constructed, and containing a miniature altar, with a crucifix and four candlesticks. But the steps were well worn by the knees of those pious wayfarers who were accustomed to pause for a few minutes and perform their devotions at this resting place, in the close vicinity of which a pearly stream went rippling by.

As Sir Ernest approached the chapel, he beheld a monk praying before the altar and the ecclesiasti , who by his garb belonged to the Carthusian order, rose from his suppliant posture the moment the sounds of horses' hoofs fell upon his ears.

'This is father Cyprian,' said Konrad, as he caught a glimpse of the holy man's countenance, which was nevertheless half shaded by his sombre cowl.

The monk at the same time recognised the young page who had just spoken; and flinging back the dark hood, he accosted the Knight, observing, 'I presume that your Excellency is Sir Ernest de Colmar?'

'A reply was given in the affirmative; and the Knight dismounting, from his steed, and throwing the reins to one of his youthful dependants, walked aside in company with the priest. Gaining the bank of the rivulet, they seated themselve in the refreshing shade of a large tree; and the brief delay afforded by the movement, ere they entered upon the business of the interview, gave Sir Ernest de Colmar an opportunity of observing the personal appearance of Father Cyprian.

He was a tall man—remarkably upright—and evidently of well knit and symmetrical proportions, in spite of the disfiguring nature of the Carthusian garb, which was a long, loose, black woollen gown, gathered in at the waist by a thick cord. The cowl, though now thrown entirely back, was made, so that it might be drawn completely over the face; and to the rope which formed Father Cyprian's girdle, were suspended a rosary and a scourge. On his feet he wore sandals of the coarsest description—and thus far his appearance denoted a rigid austerity of habits and discipline. But the experienced eye of Sir Ernest de Colmar was not be deceived by the roughness of the monk's dress and the conspicuous manner in which the knotted and blood-stained scourge was displayed to view. For in Father Cyprian's features, which were strikingly handsome, the traces of strong passions might be read; sensuality was marked in every lineament:—and, notwithstanding his studied endeavor to mantain a cold demeanor, the peculiar expression of the lips and the sinister light that gleaned in his large grey eyes, plainly denoted that his thoughts were far more of a worldly description than he wished them to appear. His age was about forty; his complexion was pale—but his lips were full, and of a bright red;—and his hair of a dark chesnut, with a small patch shaven off on the crown, was long and curled naturally.

Such was Father Cyprian, the Carthusian; and the first impression which he thus made upon the Knight was by no means favorable: indeed, Sir Ernest resolved to treat him with a really prudential reserve, although with a becoming courtesy.

'These are troublous times, holy father,' said the Knight, beginning the conversation: 'and it behoves every man to display proper credentials to the eyes of those with whom he seeks to transact affairs of weight and importance. My page has already informed you who I am, and that I travel as a trusty agent in the service of his Highness Albert of Austria.'

'Were you not thus employed by that illustrious Prince,' responded Cyprian, 'you could not have known whither to send your page in search of me. But what has his Highness the Duke empowered you to say to me?'

'His Highness commanded me to show you the very letter which you yourself despatched to him, and which would serve as a proof that I am the representative of his Highness,' answered De Colmar: then drawing forth a document from the bosom of his doublet, he said, 'This is your writing.'

'It is so,' rejoined the Carthusian.

'And in this letter,' resumed the Knight, 'you declare that it is in your power to place the crown of Bohemia upon the head of Albert Duke of Austria.

'Such is indeed the fact,' answered Father Cyprian,

'But how happens it that a humble ecclesiastic, whose life is apparently devoted to penitence and self-mortification, should possess either the ability or the inclination thus to interfere in political matters of such magnitude and importance?'—and as Sir Ernest de Colmar spoke, he fixed his eyes significantly upon the rosary and the scourge suspended to Father Cyprian's girdle.

'With regard to my motives,' said the priest, after a few minutes' deep thought, 'you might have spared me the pain of confessing that they are selfish: you might have understood as much without wresting the avowal from my lips.

'It is better that we should understand each other fully at the very outset of our negociations,' observed the Knight. 'Proceed, then, to explain the means which you have at your disposal, and the reward you expect for the employment of those means in behalf of Duke Albert.'

'Peradventure your Excellency is a stranger in Bohemia,' said Father Cyprian and therefore indebted only to flying rumors and conflicting reports for any knowledge which you may possess with regard to the troubles that have plunged the affair of this country into such confusion.'

'Such is indeed the case,' returned de Colmar; 'and I should esteem myself favored if you would give me a sketch of the exact position of opposite parties and conflicting interests in Bohemia.'

Cheerfully will I accede to your request, Sir Knight,' answered the Carthusian. Twenty years have elapsed since John Huss began to preach the Reformation of the Roman Church. A grand council of Sovereigns and Prelates was assembled at Constance; and John Huss, being cited before that august tribunal, was accused of heresy. The result was, as your Excellency must be well aware, that Huss was condemned to death and burnt at the stake. But alas! the feeling which he had excited in Bohemia was not subdued by the smoke of his funeral pyre; and in his very ashes, scattered to the winds, there seemed to exist that spirit which prompted his disciples to propagate his doctrine and fan the flame of a rancorous hostility against the priesthood. This work was however continued secretly and cautiously until about two years ago—when a new leader of the Reformers started up in the person of John Zitzka, surnamed the *One-Eyed*. This desperate man was the Lord Chamberlain of Wenzel, the King of Bohemia; and—'

'Was not Zitzka provoked by some private injury to take part against the priesthood?' inquired the Knight. At least, such is the rumor which had reached my ears in Austria.'

'I believe there is a tale current to that effect,' observed Father Cyprian, throwing a furtive look at Sir Ernest de Colmar's countenance: then, after a brief pause, he added, 'But we will not waste time in discussing trifles. Suffice it for us to know that Zitzka placed himself at the head of the Reformers, who thenceforth took the name of Taborites: and their watchwords became, '*Vengeance on the murderers of John Huss! Down with Monarchy! Down with the priesthood! Heaven prosper Republicanism?*'—Vainly did King Wenzel seek to appease the fury of Zitzka; his Majesty was a prisoner in his palace—and the terrible Taborite chieftain ruled the city of Prague and the surrounding districts according to his own good will and pleasure. At that period I dwelt in a Carthusian monastery at Prague; and, as the king dared not openly receive a priest of the Roman Church, for fear of incurring the displeasure of Zitzka and his horde, I was appointed by the Abbot of the covenant to visit the palace secretly at night, and administer the consolations of our blessed religion to the unfortunate monarch. Six months have elapsed since the King died; but on his death-bed he entrusted his only child, the Princess Elizabetha, to my charge and guardianship. He likewise made me the depositor of his will; and he informed me where he had secreted the vast treasures which he had amassed, but which he was compelled to conceal with the utmost care, lest the Taborites should lay their hand on the fortune he had thus accumulated for his beloved daughter. The princess Elizabetha, who is now in her eighteenth year and a miracle of loveliness, is at present in a safe retreat where her real rank is unknown; for it would have been madness to proclaim her Queen of Bohemia in the face of the formidable Zitzka and his devoted Taborites. Thus, during the last six months, the kingdom has remained without a monarch—torn by dissensions—a prey to anarchy—and knowing no other rule than that of the reign of terror which John Zitzka has established.'

'Such, then, is the position of Bohemia,' said the Knight, in a musing tone. 'And now, holy father, what do you propose in respect to Duke Albert of Austria?' he demanded, after a minute's deep thought.

'That his Highness should become the

husband of the Princess Elizabetha,' replied the Carthusian. 'The Bohemian nobles would rally round the banner of a monarch who is famed throughout Christendom for his valor, and who, by thus acquiring a right to interfere in the affairs of this distracted country, would strike terror to the hearts of Zitzka and his republican horde.'

'The Princess, you say, is beautiful?' observed the Knight, interrogatively.

'Beautiful as an angel—mild, docile, and tractable,' responded the Carthusian.—'Her deceased father's will entrusts me with the sole guardianship of this charming creature.'

'And provided that, in consequence of any favorable report which I may be induced to make to my illustrious master,' said De Colmar, 'his Highness shall accede to your views,—and granting that the Princess shall have no objection to the matrimonial scheme which your Excellency has devised,—in this case, what is the recompense you demand for your aid and services?'

'To your Excellency, as the representative of the mighty Duke of Austria, shall I unbosom myself with candor and frankness,' answered the priest. 'Of all the Sovereigns of Europe have I selected your master as the most worthy to secure that prize which I have in my keeping.—Through me, he may become the husband of the loveliest and richest Princess in Christendom; and, by espousing her, he places on his head the Bohemian crown.—Having secured this high, enviable, and proud position, what is to prevent him from entertaining a loftier ambition still? For Sigismund, the reigning Emperor of Germany, is old and childless: and were it possible to find a more fitting and eligible aspirant to the imperial purple than in the man who shall already wear the united diadems of ducal Austria and royal Bohemia? Mark well, then, Sir Knight, that in raising your illustrious master to the throne at Prague, I at once place him on the high road to that still more glorious throne which exists at Aix-la-Chapelle.'

We must remind our readers that at the period of which we are writing, Germany was split into a number of States, as at the present day; but that the entire confederation was governed by an Emperor, chosen by election, and the seat of whose imperial government was Aix-la-Chapelle. In those times the Emperor of Austria existed not: Vienna was only the capital of a duchy;—while Hungary and Bohemia were independent kingdoms. These remarks will fully explain the force of Father Cyprian's reasoning, the strength of which was immediately comprehended by Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'I understand you,' said the Knight.—'You foresee that you will be rendering vast services to the Duke of Austria, and you require a commensurate reward.'

'Such is the proper light wherein to view the matter,' answered the Carthusian: then, as his really fine countenance became suddenly animated with the glow of his heart's towering ambition, he exclaimed, 'Without me, your illustrious master can do nothing in Bohemia. He cannot even discover the retreat of the Princess Elizabetha—nor obtain the slightest clue to the spot where her vast fortune is deposited. To me, then, must he be indebted for everything, bride—treasures—throne! And in return! demand the Archbishopric of Prague, with a written understanding that my cause shall be supported when the day comes on which I may stand forward as a candidate for the Popedom.'

Sir Ernest started involuntarily as he surveyed the ecclesiastic whose soaring imagination had formed, and whose bold tongue had expressed, these colossal hopes; and he could not help thinking how strongly the Carthusian's adventurous mind contrasted with that garb of almost mendicant simplicity, and with that modest rosary and humiliating scourge.

'If you deem me presuptuous, Sir Knight, said the priest, haughtily, 'our conference is at an end.'

'I crave your pardon, worthy friar, if by look or manner, I have given offence,' returned De Colmar: 'but I must frankly admit that your demands have somewhat startled me. Nevertheless, they are not altogether out of proportion with the services you may render my master. You help him to ascend the throne of Bohemia, with that of all Germany in perspective: and it is perhaps only fair that he should promote you to an Archbishopric, which may lead you to the seat of Sovereign Pontiff. Thus far, then, do I accept your proposals on behalf of Albert Duke of Austria, whose plenipotentiary I am. But it is absolutely necessary that I should be presented to the Princess Elizabetha: for I unhesitatingly and emphatically declare to your Reverence that my master is of too honorable a disposition to lead that fair young orphan to the altar without her full concurrence and complete assent.'

'It shall be as you say, Sir Knight,' answered the Carthusian. 'We will meet again at Prague four days hence; and your Excellency shall then be honored by an interview with the most lovely Princess in Christendom. Rest well assured that if there be aught of the poetical in your disposition, no mean scope for the exercise of that genius will be afforded by the descrip-

tion which you must send of Elizabeth's charms to the Duke of Austria.'

'Be satisfied that I shall do ample justice to the merits of her Royal Highness,' responded De Colmar. 'And now, reverend father, in which direction lies your route?'

'Not by the main road,' answered the priest: 'for it were dangerous for one in my garb to fall in with Zitka and his republican rabble,' he added bitterly. 'We shall meet at Prague, Sir Knight: till then farewell.'

Thus speaking, the Carthusian rose from the verdant bank—drew the cowl over his features—and, striking into one of the bye-paths diverging from the point where the chapel stood, was speedily lost to De Colmar's view.

CHAPTER VI.

ZITKA'S ENCAMPMENT.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, when the Knight and his two pages were suddenly challenged by an armed man, who was evidently performing the duty of a sentinel on the border of a wood the outskirts of which the travellers had now reached.

'Who are ye? and wither are ye going, worthy strangers?' demanded the soldier.

'My name is Ernest de Colmar—my rank is that of knighthood—and I am journeying to Prague,' was the prompt reply. 'These boys are my attendants. But if, as I suspect, the renowned Zitzka is encamped in this neighborhood, I would fain hold some conversation with him ere I continue my route.'

'Your request, Sir Knight,' returned the sentinel, 'is the more easily granted, inasmuch as I could not very well have permitted you to pursue your path without first introducing your Excellency to the presence of the Captain-General.'

While the soldier was still speaking, about a dozen of his comrades, all armed to the teeth, emerged from the wood. Three or four of them accosted the Knight, and his pages in a respectful manner; and, having assisted them to dismount led away their horses with an intimation that the animals should be properly cared for. One of the Taborites—for by this name was Zitzka's band known—then volunteered to conduct the travellers to the head-quarters of the chief; and De Colmar, attended by Lionel and Konrad, accordingly followed the man through the mazes of the wood, until they reached a vast open space covered with tents and pavilions of all shapes and sizes.

The scene was at once striking and picturesque. Surrounded by the natural drapery of the wood, which was clothed in its brightest emerald garb, the encampment presented a spectacle of patriarchal simplicity mingled with a warlike aspect: for those temporary dwellings were of the rudest construction—and the repasts, at which the hardy Taborites and their families were seated, consisted of the most frugal fare. Moreover, many of the women were clad in the scantiest raiment; not on account of a real want of necessary clothing; but because they sought to emulate the primitive manners and customs of the earliest ages of the world. The half-naked forms of these females, some of whom were of striking beauty, contrasted strangely with the appearance of their fathers, husbands, or brothers, who were all attired in substantial garments and were fully equipped with corselets, helmets, and the various offensive weapons then in vogue.

Through this wild scene did Sir Ernest and his pages follow their guide; until they reached a spot in the centre of the encampment, where several persons were reclining on the verdant grass, in front of a pavilion larger and more imposing than the numerous tents by which it was surrounded.

But amidst this group of loungers there was one being on whom the looks of the Knight and his pages immediately rested with a feeling of admiration which they could neither subdue nor conceal.

The object of attraction was a female of the most ravishing beauty.

Her complexion was of a deep olive—dark as that of a Spaniard; but so pure, clear, and transparent, that all the richness of its glowing tints shone through the polished skin. The liveliest carnation shed its bloom upon her cheeks: the brightest scarlet lent its hue to her lips. Her forehead was grandly beautiful,—high—broad, and so smooth and spotless that it would have seemed to belong to a statue, had not intellect sat enthroned thereon as a glory surrounds the brow of an angel.

But the eyes—never did more splendid orbs shine from the heaven of a lovely woman's countenance! Dark as night and deep as an unfathomable abyss, they seemed to concentrate all the glory of the sun, moon, and stars. To say that they glistened like diamonds, were to convey but a feeble idea of their almost supernatural power. For they shone with a steady—burning—dazzling lustre, as if formed of condensed light. The impression which they made upon the mind, when first gazed upon, was that they were eyes which could

see and be seen even in the midst of the blackest night. The whole iris was so dark as to leave the pupil undefined: or rather, each orb seemed one large, black, but glowing pupil.

There was something fierce and wild in these eyes of supernal brilliancy and portentous magnificence: but their expression was subdued into a more feminine beauty, if not into actual softness, by the unusual length, thickness, and jetty blackness of the lashes, which slightly curling marked the edges of the eye-lids, from corner to corner, with streaks so dark that they mitigated the otherwise overwhelming power of the eye themselves.

And these superb orbs were set in whites delicately tinted with a bluish shade, and so pure and stainless that not even a vein slight as a gossamer thread was apparent there. The brows arched nobly and were deeply pencilled: but as there was even more than the usual distance between them, their decided lines impaired not the grandeur of that radiant countenance.

The nose was perfectly straight, with nostrils of the rose-leaf hue: the upper lip was short—thus giving a slight expression of haughtiness to the face, and adding to the dazzling effect of the magnificent eyes; the teeth were white and pure as pearls, and faultlessly even;—and the small, well-rounded chin completed the classical perfection of these glorious features.

A flood of hair of that transcendent blackness which is darker than the raven's wing, and yet so glossy that it shines as with a supernal radiance, poured its silken luxuriance over the shoulders and down the back of this being of marvellous beauty. Never before had human head such a magnificent covering: for those flowing masses—those wanton undulations of jetty hue, shone like ebony illumined by sun-beams.

The figure of this lovely creature was well rounded, without exuberance, and of the most exquisite proportions. Modelled, as by the hand of a rare perfection in sculpture's art, her form had all the ease and grace which nature can alone confer. She was slightly above the usual stature of her sex; and this advantage added to the dignity of her mein.

Her wondrous beauty was moreover set off, if not positively heightened, by the picturesque character of her costume. Her figure gave the mould of its own perfect contours to a tight doublet, or jacket, of purple velvet, which was low in the body and had short hanging sleeves; and from this dress her neck and bust rose splendidly. Being open at the bosom, it was laced across with scarlet ribands; and from the small loose sleeves, came those admirably modelled arms the flowing outlines of which were in beautiful accordance with the charms of her entire person.

A crimson petticoat, reaching just below her knees, revealed all the lower part of the legs, which were robust, but faultlessly symmetrical. The long narrow feet were imprisoned in well-fitting shoes, from which various colored ribands were wound crosswise round the polished limbs, almost up to the knees, in the Highland or Albanian style.

No ornament had she upon her hair: its own dark glory outvied the lustre of costly gems; its own living gloss transcended the brilliancy of precious stones. But to each small, roseate, and well-folded ear, hung a pearl as large and as beautiful as those which history assigns to the toilette of Cleopatra. These pearls were the only decorations that the lovely being wore; but to her waist was suspended a long dagger, with the handle of which her taper fingers, from time to time, played negligently. By her side, upon the grass, lay a purple velvet cap, with an elegant plume of white feathers; and Sir Ernest de Colmar thought within himself that there was not a head in the universe which it would become more than the one that was already surrounded by a perfect halo of loveliness, fascination, and brilliancy.

The age of this woman, so gloriously beautiful, seemed to be about nineteen or twenty; and she was evidently of rank and consideration amongst the Taborites; for two young females, in attendance upon her, were seated at a little distance, gazing upon their mistress in mingled admiration and respect. These handmaidens were both beautiful creatures: the elder was eighteen, and the younger seventeen; and they were dressed not only with neatness and simplicity, but in a strict accordance with modest propriety.

At a short distance from that woman, whose charms realised in Sir Ernest de Colmar's mind all the fabulous descriptions of female loveliness with which romance abounds, a grim and ferocious-looking warrior was reclining upon the green sward.

He was a man apparently in his forty-fourth or forty-fifth year. Handsome he had evidently once been; but the loss of his left eye—the stern expression which warlike habits had given to his features—the immense quantity of black hair which shaded his forehead and surrounded his face, and his rude military garb—all these gave him an aspect of savage wildness and rendered him a being terrible to contemplate.

In the same way that the beauteous woman above described had her two hand-

maidens in attendance, so was this grim warrior waited upon by two Taborite soldiers, who appeared to watch with eagerness for the slightest sign that he should make, as if it were an adored and worshipped master whom they were thus zealous to obey.

Such was the group of individuals reclining negligently upon the grass in front of the principal pavilion, and into whose presence Sir Ernest de Colmar was introduced in the manner already mentioned. In the one-eyed warrior he had no difficulty in recognising the formidable and enthusiastic Zitzka; but who that female so grandly beautiful might be, he had yet to learn.

Having surveyed the Knight with great attention for a few moments, an expression of mingled surprise and pleasure began to appear upon Zitzka's countenance; but instantly checking that amiable relaxation of his features, he said, 'Who art thou, good stranger?'

But the eyes of the Knight were fixed with admiration and amazement upon the charming creature whose exquisite form was half-reclining in so gracefully voluptuous an attitude upon the soft herbage and when the Taborite chief repeated his question somewhat sharply, Sir Ernest de Colmar turned towards him with a sudden start, as if abruptly awakened from the midst of a delicious dream.

'Who art thou, stranger?' demanded Zitzka, fixing his bright black eye searchingly on our hero's features.

Sir Ernest mentioned his name and rank, adding that he was a native of Austria, and engaged in the service of the Sovereign Prince of that Duchy.

'I pray thee, be seated, Sir Knight,' said Zitzka, in a mild and even respectful tone: then, turning towards his two companions, he exclaimed, 'Arnold, Heinrich, bestir yourselves, and bring refreshments hither. See, too, that a flask of wine be not wanting.'

The men sprang to their feet and hastened into the pavilion; while Sir Ernest de Colmar placed himself on the green sward between the grim Taborite chief and the lovely dark-skinned woman, whose eyes had scanned him rapidly but searchingly from head to foot: and, ere those bright looks were withdrawn, they had lingered with satisfaction, for a moment, upon his handsome, frank, and noble countenance.

'There is amongst us,' said Zitzka, 'but little of that ceremony which prevails in courtly circles and lordly halls; and it is, therefore, unnecessary for you, Sir Knight, to await a formal introduction to that lady on your left hand ere you venture to address your conversation to her. She is beautiful, you perceive, and can be as agreeable as she is lovely,' added the Taborite chief, suffering his features to relax for a moment into a grim smile: then, after a few instants' pause, during which Sir Ernest de Colmar had made a low bow to the lady, who returned it with a graceful inclination of the head, Zitzka observed, 'I may as well inform your Excellency that she is no relation of mine—nor is she even a native of my own Bohemia. But I love her as if she were my own child: she is to me as a daughter; and there is not a man in my army who would hesitate to face even the most horrible of deaths for her sake.'

'You doubtless come, lady, from a far-off clime,' said Sir Ernest—'a clime as sunny as the light which your looks diffuse around?'

'Yes; the land of my birth is where the gorgeous East decks its favorites with gems and pearls, and gold,' answered the splendid creature, in a voice of such rich and flowing melody, that it poured like an ecstatic flood of heavenly music in unto the very depths of his ravished soul. 'From the proudest monarchs that ever swayed that oriential sceptre which is so magnificent in its barbarism, and from the loveliest race of houris that ever blest the earth with charms appropriate only to the realms of paradise—from these am I descended! And would'st thou know my name, Sir Knight?' demanded this being, as singular as she was beautiful—as mysteriously romantic as she was supernaturally lovely: then, fixing upon him all the power of those eyes, which, in their velvet blackness, concentrated the burning, dazzling, overwhelming light of a myriad lamps, she said, with an almost wild significancy, 'My name is Satanais.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar started, as this name, so ominous and terrible, struck his ear: but, instantly recovering himself, he observed with a smile, 'I have a sufficient acquaintance with the Mohammedan creed—having borne my part in battle against the Turks—to know that the name which you have mentioned, charming lady, means '*The Child of Satan.*' But it can scarcely belong to you; for were your personal appearance to suggest your name, it should be '*The Daughter of an Angel.*'

'I thank you for the compliment, Sir Knight,' said the lady, in a grave tone; and as she cast down her eyes at the same moment that she spoke, it seemed to De Colmar as if a powerful light, hitherto streaming upon his countenance, were suddenly withdrawn. 'Nevertheless,' she added, at the expiration of a few moments,

and raising her looks once more, 'my name is Satanais, dark and ominous though its meaning be.'

'She speaks truly,' observed Zitzka, in a low tone, to the Knight: 'her name is Satanais—but whence she obtained it, or why it was conferred upon her, is one of the many mysteries that make up the sum total of the wild and almost incredible romance which constitutes the history of her life.'

'You interest me strangely in this being whom all circumstances—beauty, name, nation, and history—combine to invest with a species of supernatural attraction,' said the Knight, also speaking in a low whisper. 'An invisible but witching halo appears to surround her: she seems to dwell within a magic circle, which her own radiant presence fills with light, but which, nevertheless, presents an adamantine barrier against every effort which imagination may exert, or which conjecture may make, in order to penetrate the wild mystery that thus envelopes her.'

'And from my lips will your Excellency glean nothing with regard to Satanais,' rejoined Zitzka, in a tone of remonstrance, as if De Colmar were seeking to know too much for one who was a complete stranger.

'I demand your pardon, General,' said the Knight, with a manly frankness, which instantly brought a good-humored smile to the countenance of the Taborite chief: 'it was wrong—nay, even insolent on my part—to press you with my queries, seeing that this is the first time we have ever met.'

While he was thus speaking, Zitzka's two personal attendants, Arnold and Heinrich, re-appeared from the pavilion; and they speedily spread upon the grass the provisions and wine with which they were laden.

The sun was now setting behind the western hills, and the shades of evening were gradually acquiring an increased power. But even through the semi-obscurity of twilight did the splendid eyes of Satanais glow and burn with a supernatural lustre; and the deeper grew the dusky shadows in the midst of the wood, the more frequently did the mysterious creature seem to fix those shining orbs upon the countenance of the Knight: yet, whenever some instinctive impulse told him that she was thus gazing upon him, and made him glance rapidly towards her, her eyes were invariably withdrawn instantaneously.

The repast was partaken of by Zitzka, Sir Ernest de Colmar, his two pages, and the handmaidens of Satanais, Arnold and Heinrich performing the part of servitors. The Taborite chief ate only bread and dried fruits, and drank naught save water; but Satanais quaffed the sparkling wine, which Sir Ernest de Colmar courteously poured out and gallantly presented to her; and as she gave him back the cup, it struck him that her taper fingers touched his hand otherwise and in a more lingering manner than as if through pure accident. At the same instant, through the darkness which had by this time deepened considerably, shone those glorious eyes with a supernal dazzling, and bewildering light.

At length the meal was ended; and Zitzka, rising from his seat upon the ground, said, 'It is the hour for retiring to rest, after the fatigues of the day. Behold! the good Taborites have withdrawn to their tents—silence prevails throughout the encampment.'

While Zitzka was thus speaking, Sir Ernest de Colmar proffered his hand to Satanais, to assist her to rise from the sward, on which the dews—those pearly tears of night—were now settling; but, light as a fawn, she sprang upon her feet, and, placing the plumed cap upon her head, threw over her polished shoulders a rich velvet scarf, which one of her handmaidens presented to her.

'May all good genii attend upon your repose, Sir Knight,' she said: then, approaching Zitzka, the beautiful creature folded her arms meekly across her bosom, cast down her looks, and awaited his blessing.

The moon shone forth from the deep blue arch of heaven; and its silver rays illumined this picturesque scene, bringing out into strong relief the tall, martial, and grim form of the Taborite chief, as he extended his hands over the slightly inclining head of that glorious creature, and in a low but impressive tone invoked all the bounties of Providence in her behalf: then, gently touching her high and noble forehead with his lips, Zitzka exclaimed in a louder voice, 'I bless thee, Santanais, and I adjure the spirit of the murdered Huss to watch over thy slumbers and defend thee from evil!'

The lady made a low obeisance; and as she raised her head again, it struck the Knight that her superb eyes glanced rapidly towards himself. But at the next moment she turned away—and, attended by her handmaidens, passed along the side of the great pavilion without entering it, and plunged into the deep recesses of the wood.

Zitzka now conducted Sir Ernest de Colmar to a tent which was divided into two compartments each fitted up with a due regard to comfort. The Knight took possession of one division—his pages of the other: and when the Taborite chief had retired to his own pavilion, Sir Ernest,

seating himself on the couch which had been prepared for his accommodation, fell into a train of wild and bewildering conjectures with regard to the magnificent Satanais.

CHAPTER VII.

FRESH MYSTERIES.

No wonder was it that the thoughts of Sir Ernest de Colmar should be thus centred in the contemplation of that image which seemed to be an impression left upon his mind by a delicious dream, rather than the reflex of a reality. For a loveliness of so extraordinary a nature, combined with such a profound and romantic mysteriousness of name, nation, and character, could not fail to excite a vivid interest in the breast of any one who was brought for the first time in contact with that earthly houri.

That she was no relation of Zitzka, had been positively asserted: but that the Taborite chief looked upon her in the same light as if she were a well-beloved daughter, was as pointedly declared. Sir Ernest de Colmar appreciated all the delicacy of this latter intimation which Zitzka had conveyed to his ear: it was a homage rendered to the fair fame of Satanais—it was an averment seasonably made to annihilate at the very outset any suspicion which might be engendered detrimental to the lady's honor. Equivocal as her presence in the Taborite encampment had for a moment appeared to Sir Ernest, he was speedily enlightened on that head; and the honest, frank, and unmistakable remark of Zitzka so far proclaimed her true position inasmuch as it showed that she was not the one-eyed chieftain's mistress. And if anything were wanting to confirm this intimation, the additional proof was furnished not only by the filial, confiding, and ingenuous manner in which Satanais had approached the Taborite General to receive his blessing—but also by the paternal, sincere, and unaffected way in which that benediction was bestowed by the grim warrior.

Who, then, was the charming and dark-eyed Satanais?—for what purpose had she taken up her abode with the Taborites?—and how happened it that a creature of such celestial beauty should possess a name of such infernal origin?

To none of these queries which sprang up in his mind, could Sir Ernest de Colmar even conjecture a response: they defied all the efforts of imagination to elucidate or explain. A deep impenetrable mystery surrounded that glorious being: and the longer the Knight reflected upon her charms, her name, and her presence amongst the Taborites, the more bewildered did he become.

That she was a Christian, there was every reason to imagine: for had she not received a Christian benediction?—and did not her countenance indicate at the time that her heart was touched by the manner in which Zitzka invoked the spirit of the murdered Reformer to watch over her? But, if she were indeed a Christian, how could she retain so singular and ominous an appellation as that which stigmatised her as the Daughter of Satan? And this circumstance seemed to the Knight to be the more bewildering, inasmuch as the Taborites, with whom she was represented to enjoy such an immense influence and by whom she was so enthusiastically beloved, were an austere, simple, pure-minded, and republican community, believing that everything primitive and natural was best, and that everything strained and artificial was pernicious and wrong. Yet so far from being shocked by the presence of one who bore the name of Satanais, these good Taborites (whose character Father Cyprian had malignantly aspersed by unmerited epithets) idolized and adored the mysterious lady, and would have perished in avenging the slightest look or the merest word that threatened her with insult

Such was the crowd of thoughts which swept through the brain of Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he sat upon that couch to seek the repose of which he experienced not the slightest inclination. The activity of his mind prevented him from experiencing any physical fatigue after his day's journey. The image of Satanais sustained within him the excitement of a lively curiosity and a deep interest: and he felt a vague, mysterious, and undefinable longing to know more of her—to penetrate into her history—to draw aside that veil of romance which enveloped her entire being—to bring down as it were the goddess from her high pedestal, in the hope that a nearer view would reconcile all her influence, power, and fascination with the attributes and the circumstances of a mortal woman.

And now Sir Ernest de Colmar began to ask himself whether the almost superhuman beauty of that magnificent creature had made an impression upon his heart. But he was better skilled in war and diplomacy than in love; and his experience was greater in cutting his path through the serried ranks of battle than in tracing his way amidst the roseate bowers of Venus. The dry technicalities of politicians were more familiar to his ear than the language of passion: in a word, the Knight had never as yet known what love was!

But now he began to fear that his soul was warming at length with the mystic fires of passion—that his heart had begun to throb beneath the strange and thrilling spell: there was a sensation of mingled restlessness, pleasure, and suspense upon him;—and, instead of experiencing the slightest desire to seek his couch, he felt as if the fresh breeze of heaven would be more welcome to his heated brow, and the soft moonlight in the solitude of the wood better calculated to tranquillise his thoughts

Under the influence of these ideas, Sir Ernest de Colmar rose from his seat—passed through the outer division of the tent, where his two pages were already wrapt in a profound slumber—and sallied forth upon the green sward. The moon was shining gloriously upon Zitzka's white pavilion and the surrounding encampment: every object seemed swathed in a flood of the purest silver. All was still: for in the open space where the tents were pitched, no sentinel broke the witching silence of the night with his measured tread. It was around the outskirts of the wood that the guards were stationed at short intervals; and their posts were too far removed from the encampment to enable them to exercise any supervision over what was passing within its precincts.

Thus was it that Sir Ernest de Colmar proceeded unobserved and unchallenged across the green sward; and, on reaching the wood, he plunged into its dense shade. But in a few moments he emerged upon a narrow pathway formed amidst the verdant labyrinth;—and now it suddenly struck him that it was this very same portion of the wood that Satanais and her handmaids had entered, when retiring for the night.

A feeling of delicacy instantaneously prompted Sir Ernest de Colmar to retrace his steps, and either withdraw to his tent or at all events seek another direction for his solitary ramble: but scarcely had the propriety of adopting this course suggested itself when a strain of music came floating through the wood, in low—solemn—and—awe-inspiring cadence. He paused—listened—and speedily became convinced by the swelling undulations of the harmony that it emanated from some arched building or vaulted cavern at no great distance. At the same moment that he arrived at this conclusion, he beheld a light gleaming and growing stronger through the maze of trees; and curiosity prompted him to advance in that direction. For his mind, being previously filled with the image of Satanais, instantly associated this charming creature with the music which still came stealing upon his ears;—and he felt that if she resided in some building, there was no longer any impropriety in wandering towards her abode;—for the sense of delicacy which had made him pause and prepare to turn back ere now, had sprung from the belief that a mere canvass tent was most likely the dwelling-place of herself and her handmaidens.

Without farther hesitation or restraint, he therefore now pursued the narrow pathway, which led across a bridge over a rippling stream. As he thus went on, the music became more distinct and the light grew stronger. At length he suddenly found himself close under the wall of a building which seemed to be entirely embowered by the dense foliage of the trees. From a small, deeply-set, circular window the light streamed; and it was also from within this structure that the music flowed forth.

The partial survey which Sir Ernest was thus enabled to take of the building, added to the sacred character of the harmony which swelled solemnly through the air, was sufficient to induce the Knight to believe that it was some holy edifice: and, passing round a portion of the wall he reached a door which stood half-way open.

Sir Ernest de Colmar was hesitating whether he should enter, when a rustling amongst the trees at a short distance met his ears; and turning his eyes in the direction whence the sounds came, he beheld several lights approaching through the wood. Stepping hastily back, and concealing himself amidst the dense foliage, he was soon enabled to perceive that a procession of nuns, headed by their abbess and two priests, was moving slowly towards the door, the immediate vicinity of which he had just quitted. The priests, who were attired in full canonicals, carried torches in their hands; and these they extinguished on the threshold ere they entered the building.

The procession, consisting of the two monks and upwards of twenty nuns, defiled slowly into the church—passing the spot where Sir Ernest de Colmar was concealed; and the moment the ecclesiastical train, with measured tread, had thus disappeared from his view, in louder and deeper tones swelled forth the sacred music.

Conceiving that there could not be any harm in becoming a witness of whatever ceremony was about to take place,—and wondering how Roman Catholic rites could possibly be exercised within the very precincts of that wood where the Reformers were encamped,—Sir Ernest de Colmar pushed open the door and entered the building. He found himself in a small church, the aisles of which were separated from the nave by rows of thick and handsome

marble pillars; and in these aisles were several monuments surrounded by the sculptured effigies of bishops, abbots, monks, and nuns.

By passing amidst these tombs, the Knight was enabled to gain the close vicinity of the chancel without being observed by any one present in the church; and on taking his stand between two high monuments, he placed himself in such a position as to see everything that was progressing, without being seen.

On the altar which stood in the chancel, several wax-lights were burning: the two priests were now stationed there;—and kneeling around, in a semi-circle, the nuns appeared to be absorbed in deep devotion.

The majestic roll of the organ now swelled beneath the vaulted roof and echoed grandly through the groined archways of the aisles: then followed a combination of the voices of the priests and the nuns chanting the *Te Deum* in full chorus. The effect was solemnly and sublimely interesting: but the greater grew the wonder of the Knight that the votaries of the Roman Church should be allowed to perform their midnight mass within a distance of two hundred yards of Zitzka's pavilion!

It however appeared that Sir Ernest de Colmar was destined to behold as many bewildering mysteries, within the precincts of the Taborite station, as those which had so startled and amazed him on the previous night in the Castle of Altendorf.

For, as the grand music and the awe-inspiring chant died slowly away, a door near the altar opened—and the formidable Zitzka made his appearance, leading forward a lady clothed in virgin white and having a beautiful veil over her countenance.

A frown sat upon the brow of the Taborite as he glanced from the altar to the priests—from the priests to the nuns—and then at the being of faultless form whose fair hand he held: but his cheeks became suddenly purple with rage, and his one eye shot forth fire, when the nuns began to weep bitterly—beat their bosoms—clasp their hands in anguish—and demonstrate every possible sign of a fanatic and wild grief.

'Where is the strayed sheep?' demanded one of the priests in a loud sonorous voice. 'Hath the Lord restored her to the sheepfold? or doth she blindly and perversely adhere to her resolution of following a strange shepherd?'

'Here is our sister! here is the strayed sheep!' chanted forth the soft voices of the nuns in harmonious modulation, while the organ gave a faint and low accompaniment of a tender expression. 'O guardian saints! restore the wanderer to our arms—and her sins shall be forgiven!'

The voices and the music stopped suddenly; there was an awful pause;—and the eyes of all present were fixed upon the veiled lady whom Zitzka had led forward to the front of the altar. The nuns extended their arms towards her, as if imploring her to fly to them and receive a holy welcome: the lips of the two priests moved in silent prayer; and the Taborite chief, in his warlike accoutrements, scowled upon the scene with almost a ferocious glare in his piercing eye.

How perfect were the grace and elegance which blended in that form, robed in the virgin white? The drapery intended to envelope the faultless figure, added indescribably to the flowing outlines of its charming symmetry; and it struck Sir Ernest de Colmar that if Satanais were to exchange her picturesque garb for that simple and modest apparel, her matchless shape would exactly resemble that of the lady standing before the altar.

Slowly she raises her right arm and removes the veil from her countenance; and then her eyes sweep rapidly round the church as if to assure herself that none are present save those in the immediate vicinity of the altar.

But, heavens! the eyes that were thus revealed! Oh! well might Sir Ernest de Colmar start—and no wonder that it was with difficulty he could suppress the ejaculation of surprise which rose to his lips: for the superb orbs that now shone forth in all their burning power, and all their radiant blackness, were those of Satanais!

And yet it could not be! No! no! it was impossible! For the exquisite creature who stood before that altar, was of a complexion dazzlingly fair. Her cheeks were tinged with the softest hue of crimson, which at every moment went and came, with the respiration, as sunbeams passing through trees covered with roses play upon marble: her hair was of the richest auburn, and in the light shining from the altar seemed like a blaze of gold as it flowed in luxuriant tresses over a neck and shoulders of pearly whiteness. Oh! what glorious masses to be parted above a forehead so high, and broad, and stainlessly pure that it appeared to be the tablet on which a generous soul and a brilliant intellect had traced the noblest thoughts.

Her brows were not deeply pencilled—but they were dark enough to break, as it were, the extraordinary contrast existing between that radiant auburn hair, and those eyes of indescribable brilliancy. For it even seemed to the amazed and bewildered Sir Ernest de Colmar that the eyes of this

heavenly creature were, if possible, more splendid in their velvet blackness, and more overpowering in their luminous glory, than those of Satanais. But then he observed that the lashes of the former, though thick, long, and gently curling, were only of a dark brown hue, and, therefore, less calculated to subdue and soften the lustre of those burning orbs than the jetty fringes which shaded the eyes of Satanais.

Although the complexion of this fair creature who stood before the altar appeared to combine the softest rose with the purest lily, whereas that of Satanais has already been described to the reader as of a dark but clear and transparent olive, and although the hair of the former was of so dazzling a tint, and that of the latter was so velvet-like in its blackness, yet in the facial outline, the contours of the features, the admirable symmetry of the form, and the dignity of the stature, there was a marvellous resemblance between the two beings. When, therefore, Sir Ernest de Colmar had somewhat recovered from the astonishment into which that sudden revelation of so heavenly a beauty had thrown him, and when the train of thoughts which amazement had for a minute suspended, resumed their natural flow, it struck him that this divine creature and Satanais must be sisters. Nay, more—they were even, perhaps, twins; for their age appeared to be the same.

But scarcely had Sir Ernest de Colmar formed these conjectures, when the Lady Abbess—an elderly woman, of majestic deportment—rose from her suppliant posture, and, advancing slowly towards the radiant beauty, she said, in an imploring tone, 'Sister Marietta, I adjure thee, by all thy hopes of salvation, to return amongst us. Forgiveness and consolation for the past—tranquil happiness for the present—cheering expectations for the future—all these await thee!'

'Hear me patiently for a few minutes,' spoke the lovely young creature thus appealed to: and the tones of her voice thrilled into the deepest recesses of the Knight's soul—for that golden music which thus flowed from her tongue was of the same richness and of the same modulation as the voice of Satanais. 'Hear me patiently for a few minutes,' she repeated, after a brief pause, during which so profound a silence prevailed that a pin might have been heard to drop: 'I am not here this night to afford a sickening proof of female vacillation and mutability, but to act in accordance with that resolution which is already known to you. Well acquainted with the rigid discipline and the severe laws that prevail in your community, I can appreciate the goodness which prompts you to offer me pardon for the past. For the kind intention thus displayed, I thank you—thank you from the bottom of my heart,' she added, her voice becoming tremulous, and her lovely white bosom rising and falling more rapidly: but, speedily regaining her firmness, and lifting her head in a dignified manner, she exclaimed in the fulness of her glorious voice, 'By carrying my determination into force, I regain a liberty as complete and a freedom as unshackled as the birds of the air enjoy! Oh! mine is not a spirit to be pent up within the adamantine walls of a cold monotony or to pine within the limits of a close and constant supervision: it is a spirit that loves to tower aloft on eagle-pinion, and that would break its wings against the bars of the cage wherein you seek to imprison it. Give me, then, back the vows which I have taken—release me from the pledges which I have made—and the gold is ready for you in return. Are we not agreed as to the price?'

And, as she uttered these last words, an expression of mingled contempt and scorn curled her rich scarlet lip for an instant, as she stretched out her arms with graceful gesticulation—those arms which, naked to the shoulders, were so exquisitely modelled and so grandly white!

'Sister Marietta,' said the Abbess in a tone of deep melancholy, 'we would rather welcome thy return into the peaceful bosom of our holy retreat than bear back with us the yellow gold whereof thou hast spoken.'

'That may not be,' was the reply, given in a tone of more than feminine decision; and, as the angelic being spoke, Sir Ernest de Colmar—though himself still unseen—could catch a glimpse of the teeth, white as orient pearls, which shone between the parting roses of the lips, and were equal in faultless beauty to those of Santanais.

'Sister Marietta, I implore thee to return!' exclaimed the Lady Abbess.

'Never!' was the emphatic response. 'Henceforth shall ye call me *Sister Marietta* no more. For, oh!' she exclaimed, her voice vibrating with musical tremulousness through the church, as if it were the prolonged sound of a golden bell—'I will resume that name which my sainted mother gave me: yes, I take back that name, though not from any weak and girlish sentiment of vanity, but from motives of the purest and holiest respect to the memory of the dear parent who is now an angel in heaven! For, in that maternal pride which she experienced when in my early infancy she pressed me to her bosom, she called me

the *Daughter of Glory*, and she gave me the name of Gloria.'

While thus speaking, the beauteous creature stretched forth her snow-white arms and raised her beaming countenance towards heaven, as if in invocation of a blessing from that mother, whose spirit had long ago flitted thither: and as she thus stood—all grace, all symmetry, and with that flood of glowing hair rolling in lustrous masses over her shoulders of dazzling whiteness, arrayed, too, in that virgin vesture, which fitted close to her shape, and marked all the rich contours of its exquisite proportions, she did, indeed, appear a radiant being from another world—a Daughter of Glory descended from the skies—a Child of Light come down upon the earth to bless the eyes of men with her angelic presence.

Dazzled, bewildered, and half intoxicated with the spectacle—feeling as if celestial rays had shot from those dark and lustrous eyes into his very soul, illuminating all its most secret recesses and filling it with a passionate tenderness—Sir Ernest de Colmar gazed upon Gloria with a worship and an adoration which he had never yielded before to a human being. It was with indefinable emotions of fear and awe, mingling with his pleasure and satisfaction, that he had so recently been pondering in his tent upon the image of Satanais; but it was with an unmixed delight and an ecstatic rapture that he now dwelt upon the radiant creature who stood before him there: and whereas some secret warning voice had appeared to whisper in his ear that there was a delicious poison in the bewitching looks of Satanais—so, on the other hand, did it now seem as if a heavenly essence were mingled with the intoxicating draughts which his soul was drinking in from the halo of loveliness and light surrounding the form of Gloria.

And there was a long pause and a dead silence after the angelic creature had declared that thenceforth she repudiated the monastic denomination of *Sister Marietta*, and resumed the admirably appropriate name which a mother's natural pride and tenderness had bestowed upon her.

Then, as the words which conveyed this announcement died in low echoes along the vaulted aisles, the two priests raised their looks mournfully to heaven, and the nuns covered their countenances with their hands as if in deepest sorrow, while satisfaction gleamed in the eye of the formidable Zitzka, who was leaning upon his sword at a short distance from the altar.

Thus several minutes had passed—and at length the organ began to pour forth its solemn strains once more.

Then Gloria, taking the long white veil in her hands, threw it over her head, and sinking slowly upon her knees, she crossed her arms meekly above her bosom.

The nuns rose from their suppliant posture, and, advancing with measured tread, formed a complete circle about her; while the priest began to chant a mournful hymn, the words of which Sir Ernest de Colmar could not catch.

Presently the Lady Abbess, whose countenance was now marked with an expression of the sternest severity—placed her hand upon the costly lace veil and gently drew it from Gloria's head—so that the light streaming from the altar, again displayed all the effulgence of that flood of silken hair.

Deeper and more solemn grew the chant of the priests as the veil was thus being removed; and gradually did the soft voices of the nuns mingle in the plaintive hymn. But in a few minutes, the chorus was brought to conclusion—the harmonious murmurs dying away in the distance like the songs of aerial beings.

Then the Lady Abbess suddenly rent the veil in halves—and the nuns began to beat their bosoms again, and give vent to low moanings and half-stifled sobs.

But in the midst of this strange and even painful spectacle, Gloria rose slowly from her knees, with a radiant expressisn of triumph and satisfaction upon her angelic countenance.

'Sinful daughter,' exclaimed the two priests simultaneously, and speaking in loud sonorous tones,—'henceforth thou art an outcast from the true sheepfold; and we abandon thee to the strange shepherd whom thou hast chosen to follow.'

'Sinful sister, cried the voices of the nuns, swelling in plaintive chorus,—'henceforth thou art an outcast from the community; and we know thee no longer.'

The voices ceased abruptly—and the Lady Abbess, raising her hands above the radiant head of Gloria, said in a deep sepulchral tone, 'Woman, I give thee back thy vows—I restore thee thy pledges which thou didst make to me, who am the humble servitress of heaven. And in thus releasing thee from the bonds which lately bound thee, body and soul, to——'

At this moment Sir Ernest de Colmar was startled by the rustling of a dress, the sound of which appeared to come from amidst the tombs where he himself was concealed. He turned his head suddenly, and beheld the tall figure of a monk, whose countenance was complely enveloped in his cowl, glide rapidly between the monuments at a short distance, and as if about to pass into the nave or body of the church.

So abrupt was this little incident in its occurrence, and so quickly was the appearance, that Sir Ernest de Colmar could scarcely believe it to be a reality, but was almost inclined to think that his fancy, powerfully acted upon by the wild and romantic incident of the last few hours, had conjured up some strange delusion.

Turning his eyes, therefore, again in the direction of the altar, he perceived that the Lady Abbess was still continuing her address, the thread of which the Knight had momentarily lost.

'Yes—thou art free, O sinful woman!' exclaimed the Abbess, while Gloria appeared to listen with mingled contempt and disdain, and Zitzka was evidently laboring under the greatest difficulty to suppress a violent ebullition of passion: 'thou art free to follow thine own perverse disposition and the counsels of thine evil advisers. But ere now thy tongue taunted us with the agreement which we had made to release thee from thy vows on the payment of a sum of gold. But know, O false-hearted heretic! that it was in the light of an oblation to the Virgin's shrine that we should have recived the precious metal which yon warrior promised.'

'Will this scene end speedily?' demanded Zitzka, with an abruptness which denoted how completely his patience was worn out.

''Tis ended now,' said the Abbess, in a severe tone. 'Nevertheless, I have one word more to utter—and I crave your patience. The yellow gold which thou hast brought with thee, O ruthless man of war! and which was the stipulated price for the proceedings of this night,—that gold do I refuse—reject—spurn—shrink from, as if there were blood upon it!'

'By heaven!' ejaculated Zitzka, his countenance suddenly becoming purple with rage: 'this wanton insult——'

'Peace—silence? Remember thy vow—thy solemn vow!' exclaimed the Abbess, extending her arm imperiously.

'Patience—a moment's patience!' said Gloria, in a tone of entreaty, as she threw her burning and eloquent eyes upon the Taborite chief: 'a moment's patience,' she repeated,—'and all will be over!'

'Fear not that I will molest ye again,' observed Zitzka, turning aside and averting his face from a ceremony which inspired him with deepest disgust, and at which he was evidently no willing witness.

'Have you aught more to say?' demanded Gloria, addressing herself to the Abbess. 'Methinks that you act unwisely in refusing the sum which the Captain-General's bounty has placed at my disposal to offer——'

'We will not leave a finger upon that gold,' interrupted the Lady Abbess. 'And now, lost—unhappy—wretched—perverse girl, we will leave thee even as thy God hath already abandoned thee. But, beware, Marietta—or Gloria—or by whatsoever name thou choosest to denominate thyself: beware, I say——for heaven's vengeance will sooner or later overtake thee. It is not for my hand to grasp the thunderbolts of Jehovah, nor for a poor weak woman such as I to dare to wield his lightnings. Nevertheless, do I now raise my warning voice to proclaim that a terrible retribution will be thy doom for the sin which thou hast this night committed. Tremble, then, Marietta—tremble, Daughter of Glory, as thou hast insolently styled thyself! For even as thou hast claimed back the vows whereby thou didst dedicate thyself to the service of the Blessed Virgin—so shall the Madonna inflict with her own hand a due chastisement upon thee! Tremble, then, Marietta—tremble, Daughter of Glory: for thy doom shall be——'

'The Bronze Statue—and the Virgin's Kiss!' exclaimed a loud sonorous voice; and at the same instant the tall form of a monk, emerging from the tombs in the close vicinity of Sir Ernest de Colmar, stalked forth, with his right arm ominously extended, into the middle of the church.

A wild and rending shriek burst from the lips of Gloria—and the Knight beheld her drop, as if struck by a thunderbolt, upon the velvet cloth which covered the steps of the altar. At the same moment the lights were extinguished, as if by magic: darkness—total darkness—fell upon the scene;—and Sir Ernest de Colmar, springing from behind the tombs, rushed in the direction of the spot where he had beheld the radiant being suddenly sink down insensible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAUGHTER OF GLORY

The shriek which burst from the lips of Gloria was the only indication that met the Knight's ear of any surprise or alarm being felt at the sudden apparition of the monk—the strange words which he had uttered—or the extinction of the light, and the consequent plunging of the church into total darkness. Even Zitzka was silent; but how this could be, Sir Ernest had no time to reflect—for there was a rush of many footsteps towards the door, as if

nuns and priests were hurrying out of the church with all possible speed. And, in addition to these rapid shuffling sounds, there was a noise as of a desperate struggle taking place somewhere in the vicinty of the altar: but in a few moments these signs of strife ceased abruptly with the fall of a heavy body.

Bounding on through the pitchy darkness—jostling against the fugitive nuns—and nearly overthrowing one of the retreating priests, Sir Ernest de Colmar made direct for the spot where he had seen Gloria fall;—and just as he was darting up the steps, he came in such violent contact with some individual that this latter was hurled backwards by the concussion. But to the ineffable surprise and delight of Sir Ernest, his hands encountered the long flowing locks of a woman's hair; and it instantaneously flashed to his comprehension that the man whom he had thrown down was in the act of bearing away the senseless Gloria in his arms.

Convinced that no good intention was meditated towards the lovely being, the Knight tore her from the embrace in which the falling man tenaciously held her: but in a moment that individual dealt a desperate blow with a dagger at Sir Ernest de Colmar. Fortunately for the Knight, the darkness was so intense that the ruffian struck at random; and the weapon, encountering our hero's belt, broke short off at the handle. Retaining the still senseless Gloria in his left arm, Sir Ernest instantaneously applied so vigorous a blow with his right hand to the countenance of the unseen opponent, that the latter fell heavily and without a moan—but whether dead or only stunned, the Knight did not wait to ascertain.

All this had passed in a very few moments, and in the midst of the deepest obscurity; and, having rid himself of his unknown enemy, Sir Ernest hurried in the direction of the church door, the lovely Gloria remaining senseless in his arms. But she was not dead—of *this* he was well assured:—for his hand could feel the slight pulsation of the heart growing stronger and stronger every instant.

Just as he had gained the door, it struck the Knight that the scheme of carrying the beauteous creature away was not the idea of that one individual alone from whose power he had rescued her, but must have been concerted by the priests and nuns generally: otherwise, terror and confusion would have followed the sudden extinction of the lights—whereas, we repeat, the scream uttered by Gloria was the only indication of alarm produced thereby. Convinced, therefore, that the abduction of the young lady was the object of some deeply ramified design, and suspecting that Zitzka must have encountered foul play—an idea which the reminiscence of the scuffling noise and the fall of the heavy body tended to confirm,—Sir Ernest de Colmar paused for an instant ere he opened the door—drew his sword—and lifted his lovely burthen in such a manner that his left arm held her altogether, so that his right was thereby left entirely free. For Sir Ernest resolved to cut his way through any opponents who might venture to molest eim—and either bear the entranced Gloria to a place of safety or perish in the attempt.

Having thus resolved, and with his naked weapon in readiness to strike, De Colmar threw back the door, and issued forth. His eyes immediately fell upon the Abbess, several of the nuns, and the two priests who had officiated at the altar; and the moment he thus made his appearance, with the beauteous Gloria reclining on one arm, and his drawn sword upraised by the other, ejaculations of mingled rage, disappointment, and surprise, burst from the lips of those who were assembled round the door.

For the moonbeams, penetrating through the foliage, illumined the scene; and it was evident to the Knight that the priests and nuns had expected some other individual to bring forth the charming Gloria from the church.

'We are betrayed!' ejaculated one of the priests; and a panic-terror seizing upon the ecclesiastical group, they all turned and fled precipitately.

Well pleased at having thus easily rid himself of the only persons who appeared to bar his passage, Sir Ernest de Colmar struck into the path which had originally brought him to that building, and which, he therefore knew, led to the encampment.

But scarcely had he proceeded twenty paces, when Gloria began to move in his arms: then low gasping sounds came from her lips, as if the very fact of returning animation convulsed her with an acute pain—and the Knight felt her bosom heaving against his chest. Suddenly recollecting that there was a stream close by, he bore the resuscitating lady thither: and by sprinkling a little water upon her face, he materially assisted in her recovery.

Slowly opening her superb eyes, she gazed up vacantly for a few moments into the Knight's countenance: then she closed those magnificent orbs again, as if to collect her thoughts more easily when undisturbed by outward impressions.

For nearly another minute, therefore, did this angelic being repose in the Knight's arms, her head resting upon his shoulder—

the luxuriant masses of rich, silky auburn hair flowing partly over him—her face so near his own that they almost touched, and her fragrant breath, which every moment came more easily, fanning his cheek. He could scarcely believe that all this was a reality; it appeared a wild and impossible dream. Had any one whispered in his ear at the first moment when Gloria removed her veil before the altar, and burst upon his dazzled view in all the transcendent splendour of her overwhelming charms—had any body, we say, whispered to him *then* that within an hour this bright and sunny creature would repose in his arms—that his hand should play with the rich shining tresses that had appeared so gorgeous in the light, and on which a subdued lustre or darkened gloss even now rested in the sombre shade of the wood—had any one told him all this, he would have ridiculed the idea as something beyond the possibility of human realization.

And yet the whole had taken place within the last few minutes; and there, in the depths of the wood, surrounded by the umbrageous foliage through which the moonbeams penetrated like many silver threads, and with the limpid stream murmuring musically at his feet—there was Sir Ernest de Colmar alone with that Child of Light—that Daughter of Glory!

But not an impure nor unchaste thought entered the mind of that generous warrior as he sustained the angelic creature in his arms: his soul was absorbed in a holy interest—an ineffable admiration—a species of worship too æsthetic and too full of a real poetic sentiment to allow the intermixture of a single particle of earthly grossness.

For, oh! he might have pressed those scarlet lips and drunk in their honied moisture—he might have covered that spotless forehead and each damask cheek with his caresses—he might have strained the fine form to his bosom, instead of sustaining it with a reserved and delicate tenderness in his arms: but no! Far absent from his mind was the thought of taking the slightest advantage of the position in which accident had placed him with regard to the incomparable Gloria. And if his fingers played with the soft silken tresses which flowed over his shoulder and his arm, it was an innocent and improvised toying, that could not possibly offend, even if perceived, and that arose from the exalted admiration and sublime interest which the magic of her beauty had engendered in his soul.

We said that nearly a minute elapsed ere Gloria opened her eyes again;—and during that interval she had doubtless collected all her scattered thoughts; so that she was enabled to remember the closing scene of the mystic ceremonies in the church, and thence to form the conjecture that she had either been rescued or borne away by the individual in whose arms she found herself supported.

'Fear nothing, lady—I am a friend!' whispered Sir Ernest de Colmar, as the moonbeams were reflected in the brighter and more lustrous orbs that now unclosed upon him.

'Thanks—a thousand thanks for this assurance,' returned the lady, gently rising from her half-reclining position in his arms, and seating herself by his side: then, laying her fair hand lightly upon his wrist, and bending towards him with an artless air of familiar trustfulness and ingenuous confidence, she said, 'I know who you are——'

'You know me!' answered the Knight, with a start of strange abruptness.

'Yes,' she replied, an arch smile for a moment wreathing her bright red lips: 'you are Sir Ernest de Colmar. I saw you—though I myself was unseen—during the whole time you were conversing in the evening with the Captain-General and with Satanias.'

'And who is that Satanais?—and who are you, bright and beautiful creature?' exclaimed the warrior, in a tone of enthusiasm.

Satanais is my sister,' answered Gloria, in a voice which was low, tremulous, and slightly embarrassed.

'I thought so!—I was convinced that such must be the case!' said Sir Ernest.—'For even as Day and Night, although so different, spring from the same parent—Time—so may the sunny radiance of your loveliness and the dark splendor of your sister's beauty have owned the same origin—aye, and even a twin-birth.'

'Yes—we are twins,' observed Gloria, in a tone of increasing melancholy: and it instantly struck the Knight that she sorrowed as she thought of that deceased mother of whom she had spoken with such sentiments of holy devotion in the Church. 'But, tell me, generous Austrian,' she suddenly exclaimed—'tell me the extent of my obligation to you. From what peril did you rescue me—and if from no danger whatsoever, then how came I here?'

'To speak the truth,' answered De Colmar, 'I was present in the Church throughout the strange ceremony in which you performed a principal part.'

'And what circumstance took you thither?' demanded Gloria, impatiently,—while she fixed her superb eyes upon De Colmar's countenance in such a manner that they seemed to pour a flood of light

in unto his very soul, as if resolved to read every secret that was harbored there.

'Lady, you shall hear the truth—the simple truth from my lips,' said the Knight. 'Unable to sleep, I wandered forth into the wood: soon did a solemn strain of music fall upon my ears and a light meet my eyes. Thus was I led to the church; and, conceiving that it was the mere ceremony of a midnight mass—or at all events no secret proceeding—I entered. Unwilling to attract the notice of those present, I passed amid the tombs——'

'And thence you beheld all—everything?' exclaimed Gloria, who seemed to tremble with impatience. 'But the result—the end—the circumstances which induced you to bring me hither——'

'Are narrated in a moment,' added Sir Ernest. 'You fainted—the lights were extinguished, I cannot tell how—but I rushed forward to your succor. Some man was bearing you away—I came in contact with him—and the moment my hand encountered your beauteous hair, even in that black darkness where I could see nothing, I knew that it was yours. Then I tore you from the wretch's arms—he drew his dagger upon me—but Providence frustrated his aim. With a single blow I felled him upon the pavement—and hurrying from the church, I bore you in my arms——'

'But that man from whom you thus generously and bravely rescued me,' interrupted Gloria, in a tone of strange excitement, 'was he killed by the blow which you dealt him?'

'I cannot say,' answered the Knight.—'"Twas in the dark—I paused not a moment to ascertain the result——'

'One question more,' exclaimed the young lady: 'think you that the person who was thus bearing me away, could have been the same tall monk who suddenly appeared in the midst of the sacred edifice and uttered those terrible words——'

But, stopping short, Gloria shuddered from head to foot with a tremor which was plainly perceptible to De Colmar's eyes even in that uncertain light.

'Great heaven! what alarms you now?' he exclaimed, seizing one of her fair hands and pressing it between both his own in a reassuring manner.

'Nothing—nothing,' cried Gloria, evidently making a powerful effort, which was also a painful one, to conquer the feelings of intense horror that had convulsed her entire frame. 'The question which I asked you—respecting that tall monk,' she continued, speaking agitatedly—'you have not replied to it.'

'And I cannot, sweet lady,' answered De Colmar: 'for in the darkness—the confusion—the excitement of the scene——'

'Oh! yes—it was impossible for you to ascertain who was the man from whose power you rescued me,' added Gloria, finishing the sentence for the Knight.

'But those strange and mysterious words which the tall monk proclaimed in so sonorous a tone?' said De Colmar, this portion of the scene in the church being now vividly recalled to his mind and naturally associating itself with one of the marvels which he had seen at Altendorf Castle;—'canst thou tell me, beauteous lady, what meant those words—*"The Bronze Statue, and the Virgin's Kiss!"*'

'Hush!—silence—my God! breathe not those appalling syllables!' murmured Gloria, in a voice that suddenly became low, thick, hoarse and suffocating; and at the same time she threw herself into De Colmar's arms—clinging to him, startled and terrified, as a sister clings to a beloved brother, or as a daughter might seek refuge from impending danger in the embrace of a father.

'Fear not, beauteous lady, that I will persist in questioning you upon a subject which causes pain or anguish,' said the Knight: 'but I pray you to accept the assurance that so long as I am near you, your enemies, whoever they may be and whatsoever their aims, must first deprive me of life ere they shall injure a single hair of your head.'

'The generosity of your conduct towards me, O brave Austrian warrior! inspires me with feelings of the deepest gratitude,' said Gloria,—'and makes me wish that you were my brother,' she added, after an instant's pause, and with a hesitating tremulousness of tone, while, at the same time, she bashfully withdrew herself from his arms and resumed her seat by his side. 'But, just heaven!' she exclaimed, with extraordinary and even startling abruptness of manner—'I have been guilty of a deep ingratitude and an unpardonable forgetfulness in not demanding tidings of the Captain-General—the brave and general Ziuzka.'

Ah!' ejaculated the Knight, springing upon his feet: 'I also had forgotten the Taborite chieftain. But in your sweet company, charming lady, the most prudent and cautious of mortals would lose the recollection of their vital interests. Alas! I fear that it has fared ill with the great Ziuzka——'

'Oh! let us hasten to assure ourselves that he is safe—or to succour him if it yet be time!' exclaimed the lovely Gloria, also starting from her seat, and speaking in a tone of wild and rending apprehension.

'Come, Sir Knight—we will retrace our way to the church——'

'Rather, dear lady,' interrupted de Colmar, taking her hand,—'rather permit me to escort you in safety back to the encampment; and then, having alarmed the Taborites, I will hasten at their head——'

'Sir Ernest de Colmar, I implore you to be guided by me?' exclaimed the singular creature, in a tone of passionate entreaty. 'For heaven's sake, think not of arousing the troops! Come with me—fear not that my presence will impede your proceedings in any peril which there may be to encounter! On the contrary, my arm—feeble though it be—shall second your own, which is so mighty and powerful. Behold! I am not altogether defenceless!'

And the long flexible blade of a dagger, which she drew from amidst the folds of her flowing white dress, gleamed in the moonlight across the countenance of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Strange and romantic being—as incomprehensible as thou art lovely—and as full of mystery as thy sister Satanais,' exclaimed the Knight, in the ardour of enthusiasm wrought up almost to a fanatic worship,—'tis for you to command and for me to obey. Come, then—we will retrace our steps to the church—and woe betide the wretch who may dare to menace thee with outrage!'

As he uttered these last words in a tone of terrrible emphasis, Sir Ernest de Colmar drew his sword from its sheath; and, though the good steel blade glistened brightly in the moonbeams, yet far more lustrous was the glance of silent gratitude which the splendid eyes of Gloria threw upon him at the same time.

They then began to retrace their way rapidly towards the church.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION OF THE NIGHT'S ADVENTURE.

In a few minutes the gallant Sir Ernest de Colmar and the beautiful Gloria reacher the sacred edifice; and opening the doo-gently, they listened for a moment to ascertain if either voices or footsteps denoted the presence of any individuals within.

Uninterruptedly they made their way towards the altar. Sir Ernest stooped down and felt carefully about on the spot where Zitzka had stood during the ceremony: and his hand presently encountered a human form lying prostrate and motionless.—This circumstance he instantaneously communicated to Gloria, who gave vent to a subdued cry of anguish, under the impression that Zitzka had been murdered: for that this was the redoubtable Taborite chief who lay stretched on the altar-steps, there was no doubt—his massive weapons, corselet, and other martial accoutrements proving his identity as the hand of the Knight passed over his form.

'His countenance is cold—and yet it is not the chill of death,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar. "No--life is not extinct—a spasm vibrates through his frame—consciousness is returning. Oh! for a light——'

'Stay!—in an instant I will return,' interrupted Gloria: and her soft retreating footsteps fell upon De Colmar's ear through the black darkness which prevailed in the church.

In a few moments a light flashed from that door-way near the altar whence Zitzka had led forth the angelic being at the commencement described in a previous chapter: and Gloria now reappeared, bearing a wax-taper in her hand.

'Zitzka is recovering!' exclaimed the Knight, the moment the lustre fell upon the features of the grim warrior: then, sweeping his looks rapidly around, he said, 'The individual from whose power I was fortunate enough to deliver you, beautiful lady, is not here.'

'No,' she responded, in an agitated voice, and with an evident fluttering of the heart inside the bosom that palpitated perceptibly: if alive, he has recovered his senses and fled—if killed, his accomplices have removed him.'

But scarcely had Gloria uttered these words in a hasty and excited tone—as if she was pained or rather vexed at the suspense in which the circumstance left her as to whether the individual alluded to were alive or dead, when she seemed suddenly to recollect that all her thoughts and all her care should now be bestowed upon Zitzka.

'See! the Captain General is only stunned,' said the Knight: 'He is recovering—the color is returning to his cheeks—his lips are already quivering.'

'But heavens! how murderous was the blow that did this mischief!' exclaimed Gloria, who, having sunk upon her knees in order to sustain the head of the Captain-General, and having parted his black hair from over his brow, now pointed with her taper finger to a severe contusion above the right temple. 'Let us bear him into the vestry, where we shall doubtless find restoratives—Oh!' she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, while her voice assumed a tone of rending anguish—'if he were to die, never could I forgive myself: for it was

through my fault—my self-willed obstinacy——'

'Do not afflict yourself, dear lady,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a soothing tone: the brave and generous Zitzka will not die.'

Thus speaking, the Knight raised the Taborite chief in his arms and bore him into the room whence Gloria had procured the light, and which was the vestry belonging to the church. Distressed as the young lady was at the condition to which Zitzka was thus reduced, and for which she had so emphatically blamed herself, yet she could not help admiring the comparative ease with which Sir Ernest de Colmar carried so heavy a burden; for it was evident that the Knight was as strong and muscular as he was brave and dauntless.

Placing the Taborite chief upon a sort of couch hastily formed by arranging the chairs together, Sir Ernest loosened his corselet, while Gloria bathed his brow with water. In a few minutes the grim warrior recovered sufficiently to observe where he was and who were attending upon him:—and as he glanced with his single eye from the heavenly countenance of Gloria to the handsome features of Sir Ernest de Colmar, he appeared much surprised but by no means displeased at beholding them thus in each other's society.

'To our brave Austrian guest,' said Gloria addressing herself to Zitzka, but gazing bashfully towards the Knight, 'am I indebted for my safety. He rescued me from those who had thus treacherously concerted and plotted to snatch me away from your guardianship and bear me hence, God only knows whither,' she added, a cold shudder convulsing her entire frame.

'I know why you tremble, Gloria,' observed the Taborite chief, speaking with difficulty, although with a terribly ferocious expression of countenance: 'but by heaven! if the priests and nuns of the Catholic Church dare to harm only one single golden thread of the myriads which make up the mass of your shining hair, I will lay waste every monastery—every convent—every church in Bohemia!'

And the exertion which the grim warrior made to give utterance to these menaces, actually aided in his complete recovery, rather than plunged him into a relapse, from the effects of the very severe and violent blow he had evidently received on the temple from some blunt weapon or murderous bludgeon.

'My best thanks are however due to Sir Ernest de Colmar, for the part he has played in this night's adventures,' resumed Zitzka, after a few moments' pause. 'But how happened it, worthy Knight,' he demanded, fixing his one eye upon our hero's countenance, though speaking in a tone of great respect—'how happened it that you were abroad in this vicinity at so unseasonable an hour?

'Sir Ernest de Colmar repeated to the Taborite chief the same ingenuous and candid explanation which he had already given to the beautiful Gloria, and which immediately satisfied the grim warrior.

'You have done this lady a most essential service,' he observed, glancing towards the radiant being who stood near, 'in rescuing her from the power of her enemies. Me also has your excellency laid under a deep debt of gratitude by saving from harm a young creature in whom I am profoundly interested—whom I love, indeed, as much as her sister Satanais. But you have still another boon to confer upon me, Sir Knight,' added the Taborite chief.

'Name it, brave General,' exclaimed De Colmar. 'What do you require of me?'

'A silence the most guarded—a secrecy the most implicit, relative to the adventures of this night,' returned Zitzka, in a solemn tone and with earnest manner. 'I ask you, as a belted Knight and a true gentleman, to look on these adventures as a mere dream—or as something relative to which no word must ever fall from your lips.—Should accident henceforth throw you in Gloria's way again, you will not allude to these incidents—much less question her concerning their meaning or significancy. May I demand this at your hands, with the certainty that my request will be granted?'

'You may,' responded Sir Ernest De Colmar: and raising his cross-handled sword to his lips, he said emphatically, 'I swear that I will keep inviolably secret all that I have this night heard or seen.'

Zitzka expressed his thanks for this assurance; and Gloria conveyed her gratitude from those magnificent orbs which seemed capable of dazzling, overawing, and enthralling the soul.

'Let us now retire to the encampment,' said the Taborite chieftain.

Sir Ernest de Colmar proffered his hand to Gloria, who took it with an enchanting and unaffected frankness—as if the incidents of this night had already made them intimate and familiar friends; and he led her from the church, Zitzka following close behind.

Along the pathway they went—the bridge was crossed—and at a little distance on the other side of the stream, Gloria said, 'Here must I leave you, Sir Knight.'

'But I shall doubtless have the pleasure of seeing you again in the morning, ere I quit the Taborite encampment?' observed De Colmar, pressing her fair hand in his

own, and looking intently upon that angelic countenance which the moonbeams softly irradiated.

'No,' responded the beauteous being: 'I dwell in a strict retirement——For, oh!" she added, in a sudden paroxysm of excitement, I am so different from my sister Satanais!'

'Then am I to say farewell to you now—so soon after having enjoyed the indescribable happiness of having formed your acquaintance—and uncertain when I may behold you again—or, indeed, whether we may ever meet any more?' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, speaking in broken sentences, and giving an almost involuntary utterance to the thoughts which were uppermost in his mind.

"Do you wish to see me again,' asked Gloria, sweeping her looks around, and observing that Zitzka was not at the moment nigh enough to hear this question which she so hastily and whisperingly put.

'Yes—Oh! yes!' exclaimed the Knight, but also speaking in a low tone; and, as the moonlight streamed upon the transcendently beautiful countenance of Gloria, he sought to read her response in those dark, deep, unfathomable eyes which shone with so concentrated and supernal a lustre.

'You are going to Prague, are you not?' she said, with the same rapid utterance and low voice as before: then, as the Knight made an affirmative gesture in answer to her question, she added in a more tremulous and timid tone, 'On the first day of August I shall be there likewise; and at noon precisely I shall be alone on the southern rampart of the city.'

'Thanks—a thousand thanks, sweetest lady!' murmured De Colmar, raising her hands to his lips and imprinting a kiss upon the soft, plump, warm flesh—a kiss which sent a thrill of extacy through his heart.—'At noon, on the first of August, we shall meet again.'

Gloria darted upon him a look which sent beams of enchanting—witching—intoxicating tenderness in unto the deepest recesses of his soul; and, withdrawing her hand, she plunged into the profound shades of the wood.

Sir Ernest de Colmar watched the white retreating drapery until it was no longer visible amidst the dense foliage: then suddenly awaking as it were from a deep trance, he heaved a sigh at the thought that the radiant being had passed from his presence.

Hastening to rejoin Zitzka, who was walking slowly on in advance, the Knight accompanied the Taborite chief back to the encampment, on gaining which they separated, the former returning to his tent, and the latter to his pavilion.

CHAPTER X.

THE DAUGHTER OF SATAN.

Between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, breakfast was served up in Zitzka's pavilion.

Upon a rough table was spread the frugal but plentiful and varied articles composing the meal: jars of honey, flagons of milk, piles of fruit, and thin cakes of wheaten bread, were tastefully arranged upon the board, around which Satanais and her handmaidens, Sir Ernest de Colmar and his pages, and the Taborite chieftain were gathered.

The beauitful Satanais sate next to the Knight, to whom she did the honors of the meal, selecting for him the ripest, finest, and most luscious fruit, and presenting it to him with a modest air of friendly courtesy which rendered her enchantingly bewitching. And as Sir Ernest de Colmar gazed upon her he was more than ever struck, even to bewilderment, by the marvellous resemblance existing between herself and her sister Gloria: for in the color of the hair and the tint of the complexion existed the only discrepancies, marked and decided though these were.

Had Satanais and Gloria been splendid statues instead of magnificent women, the beholder would have declared that they were cast in the same mould, but colored differently.

For the countenance of Satanais, whether viewed in the full face or in the profile, was shaped precisely like that of Gloria: the admirably formed head was fitted upon the proud arching neck in the same manner;—the bust was of the same configuration—the same contours;—the arms were of the same soft and flowing outlines—the hands identical save in complexion—the nails of the same almond shape and pelucid rosiness: the stature was the same to a hair's breadth—the waist would be measured by the same girdle to the utmost nicety!

And now, moreover, when Sir Ernest de Colmar looked into the glorious depths of the eyes of Satanais, he fancied that he even traced the same expression—the same meaning, signification, feeling, and passion in those lustrous orbs—the same supernal brilliancy in their glances—the same mingling of tenderness and pride, sunny warmth and lightning vividness, voluptuous ardor and overawing power—yes—all and each the same as in the eyes of Gloria!

But then the hair and complexion of Satanais were so different to those of Gloria! As ebony was to gold, so were the jetty

tresses of the former to the glowing auburn curls of the latter: and the olive skin of Satanais, so rich in its tints, contrasted strangely and grandly with the brilliant white and roseate softness which mingled in the complexion of Gloria. In fine, the Child of Satan was of that dark splendor which reminds the beholder of a night refulgent with moonbeams and the lustre of countless stars; whereas the Daughter of Glory was bright and dazzling as the sunlit and unclouded morn!

Such were the thoughts which swept through the brain of Sir Ernest de Colmar as he gazed upon the beauty near him.

On the same side of the table with Satanais and the Knight, sat two handmaidens. They have already been glanced at, when first introduced to our readers, as beautiful girls; and we may now avail ourselves of the opportunity to observe that they were indeed well worthy, on the score of personal attractions, of attending upon so transcendently beautiful a mistress.

The two maidens were sisters—and their style of loveliness was the same; for each possessed chesnut hair, fine blue eyes, cherry lips, pearly teeth, and a slender sylph-like shape. Good girls were they, too,—discreet, prudent, and modest; and they cherished an unbounded love, mingled with an exalted admiration, for Satanais. Indeed, this latter feeling was so highly sublimated as to amount almost to a superstitious worship; and the halo of interest and mystery which surrounded the Child of Satan was enhanced, as it were, by the reverential devotion and fervent attachment which the charming handmaidens manifested towards her.

The elder sister, whose name was Linda, had just completed her eighteenth year: the younger, who was called Beatrice was seventeen. Lionel and Konrad, the two pages attendant upon Sir Ernest de Colmar were nineteen; and it was therefore natural that they should demonstrate the most gallant courtesy towards the handmaidens. Equally natural was it that these amiable girls should experience a secret pleasure at finding themselves the object of attention on the part of two such handsome youths; they nevertheless received the marked civilities of Lionel and Konrad with a certain coyness and bashfulness which, instead of having the effect of an awkward reserve, only interested the two young men all the more deeply in those artless, timid, and well-behaved damsels.

As for Zitzka—completely recovered from the violence he had sustained on the previous night, this grim-looking but generous-hearted warrior beheld without displeasure the attention which Sir Ernest de Colmar paid to Satanais: for it was evident that the Taborite chief had conceived a great partiality for the Knight, whom he moreover treated not only with kindest hospitality but also with a marked respect.

But throughout the meal not a word was uttered relative to the adventures of the past night; nor did Satanais once allude to Gloria. In fact, had it depended on the Child of Satan, Sir Ernest de Colmar would not, in all probability, have learnt that there was such a being as the Daughter of Glory in existence: for the dark-haired sister maintained a marvellous and unaccountable silence relative to the golden-headed beauty.

When the repast was concluded, Zitzka said to the Knight 'I trust, Sir Ernest de Colmar, that we shall be honored with your presence in our encampment for a few days?'

'Most happy should I be,' returned our hero, involuntarily glancing towards Satanais, 'were it in my power to accept this hospitable invitation. But circumstances imperiously compel me to continue my journey towards Prague without delay.'

Again did the Knight, yielding to that fascinating influence which the presence of Satanais threw around him like a spell, and against which it would have been useless to struggle, even if he had made the attempt—again, we say, did he cast his looks rapidly towards her: and it struck him at the moment that she bent a slightly reproachful glance upon him, as if gently upbraiding him for the intended precipitation of his departure. But at the next moment he felt certain that this could be naught save a freak of the fancy on his part: for, rising from her seat, and beckoning her handmaidens to follow, she said, addressing herself to Zitzka and the Knight, 'We shall leave you together for the present—inasmuch as you have doubtless some private matters for your discourse.'

'One word, Satanais!' exclaimed the Taborite chief, with a smile: 'can you not join your persuasive eloquence to my poor powers of speech, in order to induce his Excellency to remain for a few days with us, that he may acquire an insight into the simplicity, harmony, and tranquil happiness of our republican mode of life? Come, Satanais—repeat the invitation which I have already given, and urge it upon the acceptance of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'If Sir Ernest de Colmar will deign to honor us with his company for a few days, he may rest assured of experiencing the most cordial welcome:'—and as Satanais uttered these words in all the melting richness of that voice which sounded like the vibration of a soft golden bell, her eyes

threw upon the Knight's countenance a rapid and momentary look of tender entreaty, which mingled with the lustrous beams that conveyed this expression of her heart's feeling.

'It grieves me to the very soul to be compelled to respond in the negative to so much proffered kindness," said De Colmar, now convinced beyond all possibility of doubt that the splendid Satanais *had* glanced upon him with a tender interest; and he felt every vein in his body tingling with an ecstatic sensation.

'Then farther entreaty were vain—and even rude on our part,' said Satanais, a softer plaintiveness infusing itself into her dulcet tone and a species of mournful langor passing into her looks. 'But on another occasion,' she added, suddenly recovering her wonted equanimity of manner, and with a gentle blush deepening the rich carnation tint that appeared beneath the transparent olive of her cheeks,—a blush which seemed to imply that she felt vexed with herself for having suffered her voice and looks to betray any feeling more tender than a mere conventional courtesy towards the Knight:—'on another occasion,' she said, 'perhaps we may hope to be honored with Sir Ernest de Colmar's presence on a longer visit to our encampment, wherever it may then be.'

'Rest well assured, beauteous lady,' exclaimed our hero, 'that I shall be too happy to render my first leisure moments available for the kind invitation which your words have just conveyed.

'Your Excellency will be truly welcome,' said Satanais.

She then passed out of the pavilion, attended by Linda and Beatrice: and it seemed to the Knight, when the canvass drapery dropped behind the retreating forms of the lady, and her damsels, as if a strain of delicious music, which had hitherto held his soul in the entrancement of rapture, had suddenly ceased.

'For a few moments—nay, for nearly a minute did a species of melancholy fall upon Sir Ernest de Colmar, as if some necessary element of his happiness had been abruptly withdrawn: but, shaking off this sensation, and angry with himself for experiencing it, he motioned his two pages to retire—a tacit command which they cheerfully obeyed, in the hope of being enabled to rejoin Linda and Beatrice in the open space without.

As soon as Zitzka and Sir Ernest de Colmar were alone together in the pavilion, the former said, 'Your Excellency informed the soldier who first challenged you yesterday evening, that you were anxious to have some conversation with me. I am now prepared to give you my full attention.'

'General,' answered the Knight, 'you are aware that I travel in the service of the Sovereign Duke of Austria. A council of Bohemian nobles is to be shortly held at Prague; and to that assembly the Duke has been invited to send a representative, with full powers to advise, concert, and act for the settlement of the affairs of Bohemia. I am the emissary to whom his Sovereign Highness Duke Albert has entrusted this important mission; and it was a part of the instructions I received on quitting Vienna, to obtain if possible an interview with you, ere the meeting of the council.'

'For what purpose?' demanded Zitzka, with strange dryness.

'To ascertain your views respecting the condition of the country—but to take no unworthy advantage of such knowledge, should it be gleaned by me,' was the prompt reply

'You are perhaps aware, Sir Knight,' said Zitzka, 'that I am not only determined to maintain Republican Institutions in Bohemia, but likewise to oppose any foreign interference to the very death.'

'Austria meditates no armed intervention, General,' observed De Colmar, emphatically: 'at least, not unless circumstances shall materially alter.'

'I am well pleased with this assurance,' said Zitzka. 'Know you what the council of nobles intend to propose?'

'As yet I am totally ignorant on that head,' answered the Knight. 'The assembly opens its sittings in the evening of the second of August; and on that same night important communications will doubtless be made by the leading noblemen who have summoned the council.'

'On that same night, think you?' said the Taborite chief, in a musing tone.

'Beyond all doubt,' returned De Colmar.

'Then I shall be there!' exclaimed Zitzka, striking the table violently with his clenched hand.

'As a friend—or as a foe?' demanded the Knight.

'Your Excellency can surely divine,' said the chief.

'You mean as a foe. But I thought it probable that some armistice or suspension of hostilities might be agreed upon between the Taborites and the Aristocracy with a view to an eventual peace. However, if you thrust yourself into danger, gallant Zitzka, it will afflict me more than I can express,' added De Colmar, in a tone of the most unfeigned sincerity.

'You are a generous and a brave man,' said Zitzka; 'and I am glad that I have encountered you. The few hours that I

have known your Excellency have worked a marvellous change in my opinions of the Austrian character. That change is for the better; and, whatever events may occur—whether Austria shall continue neutral or shall undertake an armed intervention, which, be it understood, would be *against* the Taborites, nevertheless, I shall ever entertain a high esteem for your Excellency. Should we become foes, Sir Ernest, we will prove generous enemies. And now,' continued the grim warrior, 'your Excellency will permit me to proffer a slight testimonial of my friendship, as well as of my gratitude for the services which you rendered last night. Be pleased to wear this ring,' added Zitzka, presenting a costly and elegant jewel to the Knight.

'On condition that you will accept of this one in exchange,' said De Colmar, drawing an equally handsome ring from his own finger and proffering it to the Taborite chief.

'Since such be your desire, it were churlish in me to refuse,' exclaimed Zitzka: then, the exchange of rings being accomplished, he added in a more serious tone, which seemed to imply some hidden meaning and intent, 'Your Excellency is travelling in a strange land and on a mission which may not be altogether free from danger. That God will keep you from harm and injury is my prayer: but no man can tell one moment what shall happen to him in the next. Therefore, should peril overtake you, and should enemies rise up around you, it may perchance prove that some talismanic virtue exists in that ring which you have just placed on your finger. At all events, never despair until you have tested its power and found the result fruitless.'

'But in what manner is the virtue of the ring to be essayed?' asked the Knight, feeling convinced that a deeper motive than a mere superstition prompted Zitzka to give this mysterious injunction.

'The vicissitudes of this life may plunge you into a dungeon or place you in the hands of men thirsting for your blood,' resumed the Taborite warrior: 'and should such a calamity overtake your Excellency at any time, I pray you to allow the brilliancy of the ring to flash, as if by an involuntary motion on your part, before the eyes of that individual on whose word or will your liberty or life may depend. Have I explained myself intelligibly?'

'I comprehend you perfectly, General,' answered Sir Ernest de Colmar; and I thank you unfeignedly for this additional proof of your good feeling towards me. Indeed, it grieves me much to be compelled thus to precipitate my departure,' added the Knight, rising from his chair.

'We shall meet again soon,' observed Zitzka. 'Come—I perceive that you are in haste to leave us—and I will escort you to the outskirts of the wood where your own and your pages' steeds will be in readiness.'

Thus speaking, the Taborite chieftain drew aside the canvass curtain which covered the entrance of the pavilion; and they issued forth together.

Satanais was reclining beneath the shade of a neighboring tree; while Lionel and Konrad were conversing with Linda and Beatrice at a little distance.

Sir Ernest de Colmar mechanically directed his steps to the spot where the dark-eyed beauty was thus lounging on nature's own verdant carpet; and as he drew close towards her, he perceived that she was wrapped up in profound thought. Her features, which were bent downward, wore an air of melancholy pensiveness; and her fine bust, half revealed by the picturesque garb which so exquisitely set off the contour of her shape, heaved and fell slowly with a prolonged sigh.

Suddenly the sounds of approaching steps, falling upon her ear, broke through that profound reverie in which she was plunged: and raising her glorious eyes, she sprang, light as a fawn, to her feet, on beholding Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Pardon me, charming lady,' he exclaimed, 'if I have interrupted you in the midst of your reflections: but I am about to say farewell and express my gratitude for the hospitality which I have received in the Taborite encampment.'

'Your Excellency is, then, determined to leave us?' said Satanais: then, after an instant's hesitation, and with a partial heightening of the rich carnation on her cheeks, she added, as she glanced towards Zitzka who was issuing orders to some of his men at a little distance, 'I presume that the Captain-General is about to conduct you to the point in the road where your horses are waiting in charge of our grooms?'

'Such is the hospitable Zitzka's intention,' returned the Knight.

'I will also accompany your Excellency thus far,' said Satanais, her words causing a thrill of pleasure to shoot through Sir Ernest de Colmar's entire form.

Placing upon her head the elegant plumed cap which she had hitherto held dangling negligently in her hand, Satanais threw back the long shining tresses which had flowed kissingly over her polished bosom; and with aerial lightness did her feet step glancingly along, as she walked by De Colmar's side towards the spot where Zitzka was standing.

'I shall overtake you in a few minutes,' said the Taborite chief: 'your Excellency

will permit Satanais to be your guide in the meantime—for I have certain instructions of weight and gravity to issue without delay.'

'We will proceed slowly towards the road,' observed Satanais.

The beauteous being and Sir Ernest de Colmar then entered the wood,—the two pages and the two handmaidens following at a short distance.

'Strange and romantic is the life which you lead, charming lady,' said the Knight. 'The emerald forests are your home—the wild flowers decorate the carpet of verdure which nature spreads for your feet—and the birds make you the most delicious music.'

'Yes—oh! yes—strange and romantic is the life which I lead,' exclaimed Satanais, her melodious voice sounding inexpressibly sweet with the inflections of her enthusiastic tone: 'strange and romantic has my life been from the cradle—strange and romantic will it continue until the tomb.'

'But you are happy, lady—you are happy—are you not?' asked De Colmar, experiencing a profound and increasing interest in this being of such wondrous beauty and such inscrutable mystery.

'Who is entirely happy in this world, Sir Knight?' murmured Satanais, throwing upon him a strange and even wild look with those eyes of transcendent brilliancy.

'Believe me, dear lady—believe me when I assure you, that it will afflict me severely if I thought that *you* were unhappy,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, forgetting that he had only been acquainted with Satanais for a few hours, and feeling for her all the affectionate interest of a brother—or perhaps something more!

'Is it possible that your Excellency can feign so ardent an enthusiasm when paying a compliment?' asked Satanais, now fixing her glorious eyes upon his countenance as if to read in his looks the real meaning of his words.

'By heavens! you wrong me in supposing that I am capable of playing the hypocrite towards you!' exclaimed the Knight, with a tone and manner which left no doubt as to his sincerity.

'Then how happens it that you can have experienced any interest in my welfare, in so short a time?' inquired Satanais, bending down her head, and speaking in a tone that had suddenly become low, timid, and tremulous.

'Is it possible to know you for an hour without feeling for you the friendship of an entire life!' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, also in a subdued tone. Think you, dear lady, that I leave the Taborite encampment without regret?—do you imagine that I shall forget you so soon as we have separated? No—Oh! no—far otherwise will it be!'

'Your Exellency honors me by these assurances,' observed Satanais, evidently confused and not knowing what response to make.

'The phrase is a cold one!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'But I have no right to expect aught from your lips save the ceremonial words of a mere passing acquaintanceship,' he added, in a tone almost of vexation.

'Would you ask the friendship of a strange—mysterious—incomprehensible being such as I must appear in your eyes?' said the dark beauty, in a voice that trembled greatly.

'Yes—give me your friendship, Satanais!' exclaimed the Knight: 'whoever you may be—give me your friendship—and call me by the name of '*friend!*'

'Receive, then, the assurance of my friendship,' murmured the lady.

''Tis a boon which I shall prize—dearly prize!' said de Colmar, his heart thrilling with an ineffable joy. 'But when is it probable that we shall meet again?' he demanded, in an altered and far less rapturous tone.

'I shall be at Prague on the first of August,' answered Satanais, apparently not daring to look him in the face—but rather averting her head: 'and at nine o'clock in the evening of that day you may see me for a few moments in the palace gardens, which are open to the public.'

As Satanais uttered these words, the appointment which Gloria had given him, for the same day, but for an earlier hour and in another part of the city of Prague, flashed to the recollection of the startled Knight: and in the confusion, shame, and bewilderment which now overwhelmed him all in a moment, fortunate for him was it that Zitzka at this crisis came up. Almost at the same instant, too, the party emerged from the wood into the road, where the Taborite chieftain's grooms were waiting with the three horses in readiness.

Exerting a powerful effort to regain his composure and throw off the embarrassment which had seized so painfully upon him, the Knight took a friendly leave of Zitzka, and then turned to bid farewell to Satanais.

He felt her hand tremble as he held it in his own—and under the influence of a fascination which he could not resist he pressed it gently. It seemed to him that the pressure was returned—and at the same instant the large, lustrous, magnificent eyes of Satanais threw upon him a look which said as eloquently as woman's glance ever spoke, 'Remember the appointment which I have given thee!'

She then turned hastily away—rejoining her damsels, who were standing close by, and to whom Lionel and Konrad had just said farewell.

The Knight and his pages sprang upon their steeds; and the noble animals bore them rapidly away from the vicinage of the Taborite encampment.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONVERSATION.

Our readers are already aware that it was in the year 1435, and in the month of July, that our narrative opened; but in order to impart a perfect chronological accuracy to the incidents which we are relating, it will be necessary to observe that it was on the 20th of the above-mentioned month when Sir Ernest de Colmar and his two pages quitted the Taborite station in the manner just described;—and it was between seven and eight o'clock in the evening of the 21st that the Knight and his youthful followers entered the city of Prague.

Guided by the answers given to certain inquiries which they made, the little party proceeded to the Golden Falcon, which was the sign of the best hostel or inn to be found within the precincts of the Bohemian capital.

The establishment consisted of a large rambling structure, the several portions of which exhibited different aspects and various kinds of architecture, it being evident that as the business of the hostel had increased, so were additions made to the edifice by the successive proprietors. The front looked upon the principal square or great market-place of Prague, whence diverged the streets leading to the Castle, the Palace, and the Cathedral; and in the rear of the hostel there were spacious gardens fitted up, with numerous little wooden pavilions, in which the guests and frequenters of the Golden Falcon were wont to carouse on the warm summer evenings.

The landlord, whose name was Templin, and whose appearance indicated the jovial disposition so indispensable in a host professing to draw good liquor, was a middle-aged man, with a rubicund countenance, small twinkling eyes, and a merry smile constantly beaming upon his features. He was assisted in his calling by a buxom wife and a pretty daughter; and the general urbanity of this family, added to the excellent accommodation afforded by the house, had placed the fame of the Golden Falcon upon the highest eminence.

In this establishment a suite of rooms, overlooking the pleasant gardens, was speedily prepared for the reception of Sir Ernest de Colmar and his two pages; and when the Knight had partaken of some refreshment, he desired the landlord to draw a flask of his best Rhenish wine, and sit down to share it with him. For our hero was anxious to obtain information, if possible, upon certain points; and he was aware that no one was more likely to afford him such intelligence than the naturally garrulous and gossiping landlord of a well-frequented inn.

Accordingly, while the two pages retired into the garden to discourse upon the beauties and amiable fascinations of Linda and Beatrice, whose images dwelt in the minds of these handsome youths—their master remained alone with the worthy host of the Golden Falcon.

After a few common-place observations were exchanged, and when the cups were filled a second time with the sparkling Rhenish, Sir Ernest de Colmar said—'The approaches to your metropolis are much more picturesque and agreeable than the scenery in the vicinage of the Austrian capital. While journeying along the last two or three leagues of the road this evening, I was much struck by a noble-looking white mansion rising above the verdant grove which embowers the gentle eminence whereon it stands.'

'Ah! that is the residence of the good and charitable Baroness Hamelen,' exclaimed the landlord; and without waiting to be questioned farther, she hastened to observe, 'That noble lady, Sir Knight, is a pattern for her sex; and all Bohemia ought to be proud of her. Though only forty years of age, and a very handsome woman, she is looked upon by the poor and unhappy as their general mother. Heaven alone can tell how many breaking hearts she has soothed—how many tearful eyes she has dried—how many bruised and wounded spirits she has healed.'

'You are depicting to me a perfect saint!' cried Sir Ernest de Colmar, whose generous nature was profoundly touched by the description of so much goodness and virtue. 'Tell me more concerning a lady whose acquaintance I now long to form, and whose friendship I should be proud to enjoy.'

'The Baroness Hamelen,' resumed the landlord of the Golden Falcon, 'was left a widow about fifteen years ago, when she was at the age of twenty-five. Her husband was one of the richest men in Bohemia; and all his vast fortune and immense estates were bequeathed to her ladyship. So soon as the period of her mourning had expired, she laid the foundation of that

mansion which met your Excellency's view at about three leagues' distance from Prague, and in the course of a couple of years the noble edifice was finished. But think not, Sir Knight, that so fine and spacious a structure was raised to gratify the vanity or the pride of the Baroness Hamelen. No: far different was the purpose which her ladyship had in view.'

'Doubtless some humane and philanthropic object?' remarked the Knight.

'It was so, answered Templin. 'Her ladyship's xperience, when visiting the poor and afflicted, had taught her that the misfortunes of this world fall with the heaviest weight and most crushing effect upon the widow and the orphan maiden; and when her husband's death placed so enormous a fortune at her disposal, she resolved to rescue a certain number of females in that position from the abyss of wretchedness and misery. Hence the promptitude with which she set the masons to work in order to raise that splendid mansion—a mansion which has become the asylum of an equal number of widows and orphan maidens.

'Well may you ba proud of your Baroness Hamelen!' exclaimed the Knight, in a tone of the most fervent enthusiasm. 'Proceed, worthy man—and tell me aught more that you know of this excellent lady.'

'It is now twelve years since the Baroness took possession of her new abode,' continued the landlord; 'and beneath her roof have fifty widows and fifty orphan girls found refuge. When one dies, her place is filled up as soon as her ladyship can institute the necessary inquiries relative to the characters of the applicants; for your Excellency may easily conceive that, on a vacancy occurring in the establishment, there is no lack of candidates. But in order that her charity and benevolence may be based upon certain fixed principles, the Baroness has drawn up divers rules and conditions respecting the age at which candidates are eligible, the peculiar circumstances in which they have been left, and other matters of the same kind. Thus, I believe, widows are eligible for admission from twenty-five to forty, and young maidens from fifteen to twenty—her ladyship considering that these two classes of females are more liable, at those periods of life, to be seduced and led astray by such temptations as poverty, want, and wretchedness, render almost irresistible.'

'I must assuredly seek an opportunity to testify my veneration and respect to the Baroness Hamelen,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'Such an exemplary woman deserves the homage of every true knight.'

'Your Excellency speaks the solemn truth in thus recording your sentiments,' said the worthy landlord: 'but I warn you that the mansion is not accessible to all who may choose to direct their footsteps thither.'

'I can well conceive that, having so large a female community under her care, the Baroness adopts all possible precautions to ensure the reception of only those visitors whose fame is good, and whose repute will bear investigation. Is not that your meaning, worthy host?' demanded De Colmar.

'It is, Sir Knight,' was the response. 'For it happens, as a matter of course,' he continued, in a tone of ingenuous frankness, 'that out of a hundred females thus collected together, there are many of great personal loveliness. Moreover, fifty young handmaidens are constantly retained in the service of the Baroness, as attendants upon herself and the hundred recipients of her bounty; and thus, with so many of the fair sex beneath the same roof, her ladyship could not act otherwise than with the utmost precaution and circumspection.'

'True!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'But think you that she will hesitate to receive a visit from the accredited plenipotentiary of the Duke of Austria to the Bohemian council of nobles?'

'Her ladyship will assuredly give your Excellency a cordial welcome,' answered Templin; 'and the more so, inasmuch as she is a sincere Catholic, and, therefore, as friendly to the object of that council as she is hostile to the rabid Zitzka and his horde of pretended Reformers.'

'You speak bitterly of the Taborites?' said Sir Ernest de Colmar; 'is it not possible that their true character may have been much misrepresented—much maligned?'

'Well—it is possible,' observed the landlord, speaking as if such an idea had now struck him—or, rather, had just been presented to his contemplation—for the first time. 'But I have not as yet half finished my description of the good deeds and generous actions which the Baroness Hamelen has accomplished.'

'Is it possible that you have more to relate concerning her charity?' exclaimed De Colmar. 'You have already informed me of sufficient to render her a perfect angel in my estimation.'

'And I have only acquainted your Excellency with preciselp one-half of her ladyship's benevolence,' returned Templin. 'Did you not observe a spacious, castellated, antique-looking pile of buildings at a distance of about a quarter of a league from the white mansion on the hills?'

'Yes—I remember well that I perceived and even paused to view that ancient edifice whereof you speak,' said the Knight. 'But what connexion has it with the details which you are giving me relative to the Baroness?'

'That old building is Hamelen Castle, and likewise belongs to her ladyship,' continued the landlord. 'At the same time that the White Mansion—for by this name is the new edifice generally known—received its widowed and orphan occupants twelve years ago, the Castle became an asylum for an equal number of friendless, parentless, and destitute young men, between seventeen and thirty years of age. A holy priest presides over the male community at Hamalen Castle; yet is it not a monastic establishment any more than that of the White Mansion is a nunnery. For occasionally the members of the two communities meet to indulge in the innocent recreations of dancing, music, and conversation in the saloons of the White Mansion: and your Excellency may be well assured that, not only on account of the influence of the Baroness's excellent example, but likewise through those good feelings which a sentiment of unbounded gratitude to herself engenders, the utmost propriety is observed. From these meetings, however, matrimonial alliances are constantly resulting; and when such an alliance takes place, with the approval of the Baroness, a handsome provision is made by her ladyship for the fortunate couple, who thenceforth settle wherever they choose.'

'Such benevolence is almost incredible,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'This woman of whom you are speaking must be something more than human, for her character is divine!'

'Her only study appears to be the happiness of her fellow-creatures,' said the landlord. 'Ah! well do I recollect when her humane intentions towards the widow and the orphan were first made public,' continued Templin: 'the whole city was enthusiastic in her praise! Nevertheless, there were a few discontented persons, who would look upon even an angel's visit with distrust, and who shook their heads mysteriously, intimating at the same time, in significant whispers, that the plan would prove a failure—that the idea was erroneous, however good the intention—and that the Baroness was a visionary enthusiast. But, despite of these sinister predictions—despite, also, of the dread and mysterious auspices under which the two establishments appeared to open, they have succeeded to the full extent of her ladyship's expectations, and she has reaped the reward of beholding so large a number of her fellow-creatures made happy by her pure benevolence.'

'You speak of dread auspices,' said the Knight, in amazement at the words.

'Ah! I had forgotten to tell your Excellency what a mysterious tragedy took place at the time to which I was alluding,' exclaimed the landlord; then, having refilled the wine cups, he continued in a more subdued and serious tone:—'At the same period that the Baroness was having the White Mansion built, she was also employing several masons and carpenters in altering, repairing, and improving the Castle. Amongst these men there were three brothers of the name of Schwartz; two were masons—the third was a carpenter. Now, it appears—for the story is quite fresh in my memory—that when the alterations and changes were finished at the Castle, the Baroness dismissed all the men with a handsome present in addition to their wages: but, suddenly recollecting that there was still some trifling little thing to do on the premises, she bade the three brothers remain. They accordingly stayed at the Castle; and, as it frequently happens in such cases, there was more work found for them than had at first been expected; and instead of tarrying a few days only after their comrades had left, they were kept there for several weeks. Doubtless this circumstance provoked the jealousy of some of those comrades: for the three brothers Schwartz disappeared with a suddenness and a mystery leaving little doubt that they had been murdered. The Baroness, who had already been for some weeks installed in her new abode, was cruelly distressed when she heard of this strange and afflicting occurrence: but she acted with all the energy, promptitude, and spirit which such a strong-minded and excellent woman was sure to display under such circumstances. She offered a large reward to any one who should discover a clue leading to the fate of the missing brothers—and she at once provided handsomely for the wives and families whom they had left behind them.'

'And was their fate ever ascertained?' inquired Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Never,' was the response. 'Some of their former comrades were arrested on suspicion of having dealt foully with them: but the most rigorous researches on the part of the officers of justice, and the most patient investigation made by the judges themselves, failed to elicit a single tittle of evidence to criminate the accused. They were accordingly set at liberty; and the Baroness, with characteristic generosity, rewarded them with no niggard hand for the long imprisonment which, although innocent, they had endured.'

'And yet,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, 'the general impression must have been that these men had really murdered the three brothers through jealousy.'

'I recollect that there were innumerable conflicting opinions at the time,' said the landlord. 'Some looked upon the accused persons as guilty, in spite of their acquittal—and by those who viewed the matter in this light, the liberality of the Baroness towards the suspected men was strongly blamed. Others fancied that the three Schwartz were not murdered at all; but that they had fled after either finding a treasure or robbing the castle of something which was not however missed. I remember, too, there were vague and unaccountable rumors current at the time, that the three brothers had been met and recognized in the custody of some masked horseman, on the very night after their mysterious disappearance, and at several leagues distance from Prague;—and other reports declared that they had been seen a second time—also as prisoners in the charge of men mounted on fleet horses and wearing black masks—and, on this occasion, in the immediate vicinity of Altendorf Castle, which is a good three miles hence.'

'Altendorf Castle!' exclaimed the Knight.

'Hush—not so loud, I pray your Excellency!' said the landlord in a tone of entreaty.

'And wherefore are you fearful of that name being breathed in too high a tone?' asked De Colmar.

'Simply because the Baron of Altendorf is at present a lodger beneath my roof,' was the reply: 'and his lordship occupies the suit of rooms immediately overhead.'

'Ah! then a letter addressed to the Baron and of which I am the bearer, may be speedily delivered,' observed the Knight.—'But there is time for that presently. You were telling me of the numerous vague reports which prevailed in reference to the mysterious disappearance of the three brothers Schwartz: was it generally believed that they were indeed seen in the custody of masked horsemen?'

Those rumors were not treated with particular attention,' responded Templin, 'inasmuch as their origin could not be traced. For my part, I know that I was sorely puzzled what to think: but twelve long years have passed since then—and—'

'And in the meantime your impressions relative to the matter have become more confused and less vivid,' said the Knight. 'You observed, I think, that no clue to the fate of these three men was ever discovered?'

'Never,' answered the landlord.

'The incident was indeed mysterious,' remarked De Colmar. 'And now, my worthy host, permit me to solicit at your hands some little information on other and far different subjects.'

'To the extent of my poor ability will I cheerfully comply with your Excellency's request,' replied Templin.

'Tell me, then, what the inhabitants of Prague think of the position of their capital and of their country,' said the Knight.

'First we will speak of the capital,' resumed the landlord. 'Until within the last few weeks John Zitzka and his Taborites dwelt in their tents outside the walls of Prague, to whom they gave law. But hearing that the southern provinces were rising in rebellion, Zitzka suddenly marched off in that direction with all his troops; and report declares that he has not only achieved the pacification of those districts, but has likewise obtained vast numbers of recruits. Where he is stationed now, and what his intentions are, I cannot say. But the moment he quitted the vicinage of of Prague: many of the most powerful nobles returned to the city; and, having mustered forces for its defence, they resolved upon holding a council, to which several adjacent States should be solicited to send representatives as advisors. Strange to say, Zitzka has taken no step to interfere with this proceeding, although it be in open defiance of himself and his power: and, while some look upon his inactivity as a proof of conscious weakness, others tremble lest he intend to fall on the city with the suddenness and fury of a thunderbolt.'

'And what is your opinion, worthy Messer Templin?' inquired the Knight.

'I hold to the last-mentioned belief,' was the response: 'because I am well aware that John Zitzka is no coward—no laggard—no vacillator. He has a motive for everything he does; and his present inactivity has a subtle purpose in view. In a word, Sir Knight,' added the landlord, sinking his voice to an ominous whisper,—'I fear that Zitzka is only permitting the principal nobles to assemble at Prague, in order that he may throw his net over them and make a grand prize at one fell swoop.'

'Ah! this is not improbable!' ejaculated De Colmar, in whose mind the conversation he had with the Taborite chief on the preceding morning was now uppermost: but regarding all that then took place as having been communicated under the seal of secrecy—though no such pledge of silence was positively exacted from him—he resolved to appear utterly unacquainted with both Zitzka and his intentions.

'The city of Prague,' continued the landlord, 'is at this moment tranquil enough

—the presence of the nobles and their retainers and troops having the effect of maintaining order. All the Hussites, Reformers and Taborites—or at least those who avowedly belong to those sects, have left the capital; and the Roman Catholic worship is resumed in our churches. But trade and commerce have suffered sadly; and we are all waiting anxiously for the grand day—the second of August—when the council is to meet. The fate of the country may then be decided——either by the supremacy of the Aristocracy or the Republican party.'

'And in the province—what is the state of opinion?' demanded the Knight.

'The priesthood is almost stronger in the provinces than in Prague,' returned Templin; 'and thus the Taborite cause has a powerful influence to contend against. 'Oh!' Sir Ernest de Colmar,' exclaimed the landlord, with an outburst of sudden feeling—'if civil war should arise, it will be dreadful in the extreme: for it will be a religious warfare—and such a contest will turn both sides into ferocious, rabid, raging fanatics.'

'You are right—you are right,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, emphatically: 'and every humane sentiment demands that such a warfare shall be prevented. But ere now you spoke bitterly of Zitzka and his Taborites.'

'Yes—because they despoiled the churches of their ornaments—persecuted the priesthood—shut up many monasteries and many convents—turned monks adrift and compelled nuns to go back to their parents and homes—destroyed the monarchy—proclaimed Republicanism—abolished titles of nobility—threatened a more equitable division of property—and spread terror, in fine, throughout the country. This is the sum of their wickedness,' added the landlord.

'Let us look calmly, fairly, and deliberately at these proceedings of which you complain,' said de Colmar. 'The Taborites despoiled the churches of their ornaments, you say: but the spoliation consisted only of the Catholic symbols and emblems, which they converted into coin and distributed amongst the poor. The Taborites have persecuted the priesthood, you observe: they have certainly levied contributions on the rich ecclesiastical institutions; but they have ill-treated no individual minister of the Catholic Church. They have shut up monasteries and convents: yes—those which were in a state of demoralization and disorder of scandalous notoriety. The Taborites have destroyed the monarchy and have proclaimed Republicanism; and this you allege against them as a crime: but there can be no crime in opposing one political system and advocating another. Then you declare that the Taborites have abolished titles of nobility: well, you must first show that there was a virtue in their abolition. Again, you charge the Taborites with having threatened a division of property which you yourself call *more equitable*; if, then, it be equitable—where is the wrong or the error? Lastly, you aver that the Taborites have spread terror throughout the country: but, you should remember that had not monarchs and prelates, in council assembled, doomed John Huss to the stake, Zitzka would never have raised his arm against the established institutions of Bohemia—nor would such a name as that of Taborite been known. Can you not, therefore, perceive that these Reformers are not so very far wrong as prejudice and wilful exaggeration would fain represent them?'

'Holy Virgin! Sir Knight,' exclaimed the landlord, crossing himself devoutly,—'one would almost be inclined to fancy that your Excellency is a Hussite and Reformer.'

'No—I am a Catholic, and not by any means likely to join the Taborites or proclaim myself a Republican,' answered Sir Ernest, with a peculiar smile of covert significancy: 'but I love to be just and impartial towards all sects and classes—and I am well assured that the Taborites are not such ruffians, nor is their leader such a ferocious savage as they are commonly represented to be. That they may become so, if goaded to desperation by the resistance of the Aristocracy, is only too probable,' added the Knight, in a tone of deep conviction.

'What, then, would your Excellency recommend?' inquired the landlord.

'Mutual concessions, which alone can lead to a good understanding and avert the imminent horrors of civil war,' was the prompt reply.

'Ah! fortunate is it that one of your Excellency's wisdom should have been sent to assist at the approaching council!' exclaimed the landlord. 'There is a good feeling in Bohemia towards Austria; and, as the representative of the great Duke Albert, your Excellency will have no small degree of influence with the nobles.

'I shall endeavor to do my duty,' observed the Knight. 'Know you what has become of the late King Wenzel's only child, the Princess Elizabetha?'

'Alas! the distracted state of the country has compelled that orphan princess to conceal herself in some impenetrable retreat,' answered the landlord; 'and even her best friends and those most devoted to her cause are ignorant of her present abode.'

'In whose guardianship is she, think you?

—to whose care was she left?' inquired de Colmar, anxious to learn, if possible, how far the Carthusian priest's connexion with the late monarch and with the Princess Elizabetha might be generally known or suspected.

'All that concerns the unfortunate young lady is involved in mystery,' answered the landlord. 'At the time when her royal father died, the utmost excitement prevailed in Prague—and the proceedings of the Taborites engrossed the public attention far more than aught which took place within the palace. King Wenzel breathed his last—his daughter disappeared at the same moment—confusion became worse confounded—and that is all I know. Alas! in spite of everything which your Excellency urged in his behalf ere now, Zitzka has much to answer for,' added the landlord, who, although an enlightened and intelligent man in many respects, was wofully prejudiced against the Taborites.

'Has it not been said that some private injury first provoked John Zitzka to raise the standard of hostility against the priesthood?' enquired De Colmar.

'There is a vague rumor current to that effect, Sir Knight,' was the response: 'but I know not how true it may be—nor indeed the precise detail of the report itself. I believe, however, that a sister, or cousin—or at all events, some relative of Zitzka—experienced outrage or wrong at the hands of a priest;—but whether the offence bore so exaggerated a color as that of rape or whether it were the more ordinary turpitude of seduction—I cannot inform you. Indeed, the rumor itself is the veriest skeleton and flimsiest outline of a legend that ever obtained currency; and it is more than probable that there is not the slightest truth in it. At the same time I should inform your Excellency,' continued the landlord, 'that John Zitzka was always considered a strange, mysterious, and accountable being, even while occupying the post of Lord Chamberlain to King Wenzel, and before he founded the Taborite sect. It is said that in early life he loved and was beloved by a beauteous lady of far higher rank than his own then was—and that either she proved faithless to him, or that her relatives compelled her to espouse another. However this may be, certain does it appear that John Zitzka experienced in his youthful days some grievous disappointment of this nature, the influence of which imparted a moody tinge and a misanthropic shade to his character. Brave even to the most wilful recklessness of life, he assuredly is;—and when Lord Chamberlain to the King, he had the credit of possessing a generous heart and a chivalrous disposition—although his better qualities were always mingled with strange eccentricities and peculiarities. It may therefore be that some private cause of a domestic nature originally excited this terrible man to proclaim war against the Popedom and the priesthood.'

'It is believed, then, that Zitzka never was married?' said the Knight, interrogatively.

'Such is the prevailing opinion,' answered the landlord.

'But it appears to be known that he has relatives—such as sisters, nieces, and cousins?' observed De Colmar, still in an inquiring manner.

'I am inclined to believe that even these statements are mere surmises,' responded Templin. 'In truth, little or nothing is known relative to his private history. If a near and dear relative of Zitzka were really wronged or outraged by a priest, rumor stops short with the mention of the bare fact and does not attempt to tell us who or what the lady was, nor even hints at the name of the offending priest. Therefore, supposing that the flimsy report be based on truth, the deed itself must have been carefully hushed up at the time of the occurrence.'

'Has it ever reached your ears, good landlord,' asked the Knight, 'that a very beautiful woman, of romantic name and mysterious origin, dwells in the Taborite encampment and exercises no mean influence over the Reformers?'

'Your Excellency alludes to the strange and incomprehensible being called Satanais,' said Templin, his tone instantly becoming subdued and his countenance assuming a solemn expression. 'No one knows who she is—whence she comes—or how her mysterious connexion with the Taborites commenced. Whether she be really a human creature of the same flesh and blood as ourselves—or something more or something less than woman—who can say? She may be an angel in mortal shape;—but it is perhaps more probable that she is a fiend who has assumed a lovely incarnation. Some declare that she is an oriental princess, profoundly read in the black art and able to work magic spells; others confidently assert that she is an enchantress who has sworn hostility against the human race, and that under her influence Zitzka will become a scourge as terrible as was the Hun. I have never seen her—and I hope that I never shall,' continued the landlord, crossing himself devoutly: for I am told that her eyes burn with a light so unnatural—so superhuman—so overpowering, that their slightest glances fill the soul with trouble, perplex-

ity, and uneasiness. And then her name —Sir Knight—that terrible name!' added Templin, with a cold shudder: 'alas methinks it is but too evident that this woman of whom we are speaking bears a name fearfully appropriate—and that she is indeed the Daughter of Satan!'

'Did you ever hear that she had any relatives bearing her company in the Taborite encampment?' asked Sir Ernest de Colmar: 'any sister, for instance——'

'No—such a report never reached me,' returned the landlord; then, in a tone of deep solemnity, he observed, 'Surely one fiend in female shape is sufficient to throw all Christendom into a convulsion? No—no, Sir Knight—Satanais has no sister-demoness with her: she is alone in the exercise of her dark influence—alone in the sphere of her hellish incantations! Were it even pretended by herself or asserted by the Taborites that she had a sister or any other relative with her, I should doubtless have heard the report from some one of the many travellers who honor the Golden Falcon with their patronage.'

'Accept my best thanks worthy host,' said the Knight, 'for the cheerful and interesting manner in which you have enabled me to while away an hour. I will not detain you longer on the present occasion: for your establishment is spacious enough and appears sufficiently well tenanted at this moment to demand all your attention. I will however trouble you to place this letter in the hands of the Baron of Altendorf,' added de Colmar, producing the packet with which Lord Rodolph had entrusted him.

Templin received the parcel—bowed—and quitted the room in order to execute the commission entrusted to him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PEER AND THE PRIEST.

WHILE the preceding conversation was occurring between Sir Ernest de Colmar and the worthy landlord of the Golden Falcon, a dialogue of a scarcely less interesting nature was taken place in an apartment overhead.

On one side of a table sate a tall, portly man—of dark complexion, forbidding countenance, and haughty demeanor. His age was verging close upon fifty; but his black hair was scarcely streaked with grey—and his thick overhanging brows, large moustache, and grisly beard enhanced the austerity of his mien. His dress was of the richest materials: the velvet doublet was elaborately embroidered—the collar and cuffs were ornamented with precious stones. The handle of the poniard and the hilt of his sword likewise glistened with gems—and the crimson plumes of his cap were fastened with a brooch of the finest diamond.

This personage was the Baron of Altendorf, one of the most powerful feudal lords in Bohemia.

On the other side of the table sate Father Cyprian, the Carthusian monk. His cowl, being thrown back, revealed his entire countenance, which was pale, care-worn, and bore traces of great bodily fatigue; and upon his forehead there was the mark of a violent blow or contusion, evidently received within the last few days.

A flagon of wine and two drinking cups stood upon the board; and the moment the domestic who brought in this refreshment, had retired from the apartment, the Carthusian filled his goblet and drained it with the air of a man sore athirst and suffering from weariness.

'You have travelled fast, holy father?' said the Baron.

'Four days ago I was at the grotto, which is some half-dozen leagues farther from Prague than your Lordsoip's own Castle,' answered the priest. 'There I was waiting anxiously for a communication from the Duke of Austria, in reply to my proposal.'

'And the reply has been sent,' exclaimed the Baron, in a tone of inquiry: 'otherwise, I suppose, I should not have seen you make your appearance in Prague this evening?'

'Grant me breathing time, my lord, and you shall know all,' returned the priest.—'Remember that I am sinking with fatigue, and more fitted for a downy bed than to sit in deliberation with you for an hour or so.'

'You will not have me believe, holy father, that you have performed this long journey on foot—and in four days too?' exclaimed the Baron, 'it is impossible!'

'I have occasionally obtained the loan of a horse,' answered the Carthusian: 'but all the latter portion of the route have I achieved on foot. Hence the total prostration of my energies at present.'

'And meseems, holy father, that you have encountered some accident,' said the Baron, his eyes now catching the contusion on the monk's forehead.

'By all the Saints! I must be avenged for *this*!' he ejaculated in a tone and with an expression of countenance which proved how bitter was the feeling of rancor which lurked in his bosom against some one.—'However,' he said, hastily recovering his

self-possession, '*that* is an affair of mine own, and has nought to do with our present business. I therefore hasten to inform your lordship that in the evening of the 18th a youthful page came to me at the grotto with an intimation that his master, a certain Sir Ernest de Colmar, had already arrived in Bohemia on behalf of the Duke of Austria, and that he intended to pass the night at Altendorf Castle.

'Ah! then I hope my son made him welcome,' exclaimed the Baron. 'Proceed.'

'I dismissed the page,' continued Father Cyprian, 'with a message appointing to meet Sir Ernest de Colmar at a particular spot on the ensuing day. There we accordingly encountered each other—and I developed to him all the plans with which your lordship is already acquainted.'

'Yes—yes: you need not repeat them,' said the Baron. 'And how seemed this Austrian representative to relish the proposals?'

'Marvellously well,' responded the priest. 'But he insisted upon being presented to the Princess Elizabetha the moment he should arrive at Prague, in order to learn from her own lips that she is willing to bestow her hand upon the Duke of Austria: for without such assurance, Sir Ernest de Colmar will make no favorable report to his master at Vienna.'

'Well—and is there any doubt as to the Princess giving such an assurance?' demanded the Baron.

'Not the slightest,' returned Father Cyprian, promptly: 'she will obey my instructions to the letter.'

'So I should imagine,' observed the Baron: and most strange, mysterious and sinister were the looks which the peer and the priest rapidlyexchanged across the table. 'Well,' continued the Lord Altendorf, 'thus far all appears to progress favorably: the Duke of Austria will no doubt marry the Princess Elizabetha and become King of Bohemia—and then *your* game and *mine* are sure to be won, holy father But, docile as the Princess is towards you,' added the Baron, a sudden thought striking him, 'and obedient to your counsel though she be, will she not all the same be anxious to receive some description of the personal appearance of her intended husband? If so, she can scarcely ask it of Sir Ernest de Colmar—and he will consider it indiscreet and indelicate to volunteer such explanation. Then, as neither you nor I have ever seen the Duke of Austria——'

'Tranquilize yourself on this head, my lord,' interrupted Father Cyprian: 'we know that the age of his Sovereign Highness is under thirty—and common rumor declares him to be of goodly presence.—These facts will be sufficient for the Princess,' he added emphatically.

'And when will Sir Ernest de Colmar arrive at Prague?' inquired the Baron.

'This evening or to-morrow, doubtless,' answered the priest;—and he drank off another cup of wine.

'Again must I remark that everything is progressing favorably to our views,' said the Baron: 'and yet there is an air o constraint—uneasiness—or annoyance about you, holy father, which I cannot comprehend. What, in the name of the foul fiend, ails you?'

'Many things have lately conspired to vex me,' answered the Carthusian. 'In the first place, although I am satisfied with the progress our schemes have hitherto made, I am far from pleased with this Sir Ernest de Colmar. In a word, I mistrust him—and I tremble lest he should prove a marplot——'

'Ah! this is serious indeed!' ejaculated the Baron. 'But what reason have you, holy father, for entertaining these misgivings—these suspicions——'

'I will tell your lordhsip,' resumed the Carthusian, abruptly. 'The conference between this Austrian envoy and myself took place at the chapel where the cross-roads meet, about thres leagues from your lordship's Castle——'

'I know the spot well,' observed the Baron. 'But how was it that you did not travel thence to Prague in each other's society, since your destination was the same?'

'Ah! that is the very point on which I was about to touch,' exclaimed Father Cyprian. 'To be brief, I had a certain motive for visiting the immediate neighborhood of the Taborite station; and I therefore parted from Sir Ernest de Colmar on the pretext that it was dangerous for me to pursue the high road, which led near that very encampment. We separated accordingly—he taking the main route, and I striking into a by-path. At midnight I was in a church within the precincts of Zitzka's st tion. No matter how I contrived to pass the sentries at the outposts: no matter, either, what important motive could have induced me to venture thither. Suffice it to say that in the church which I thus entered, I beheld Sir Ernest de Colmar! Yes—I saw him concealed amidst the tombs; and I recognised him immediately—though he knew me not, for my cowl was drawn over my features.'

'And this Austrian envoy was therefore in Zitzka's encampment!' exclaimed the Baron, profoundly surprised.

'He was—or rather in its close vicinity,' returned the priest. 'At all events, he was within the lines—and consequently it is

fair to conclude that he was Zitzka's guest. But how he came to be in the church on that occasion, and why he should have hidden himself amidst the monuments, I cannot divine. However, let me briefly glance at the incidents which then occurred.—Everything had been planned,' continued the Carthusian, sinking his voice to a low and mysterious whisper,—'and every arrangement had been made in order to yield up a victim to the Virgin's Kiss.'

'And that victim—who was he?' asked the Baron, leaning forward, and also speaking in a subdued tone and with an air of deep and absorbing interest.

''Twas a woman—or rather a girl—for she is not twenty,' replied the priest. 'But your lordship must not seek to know who or what she is,' he hastily resumed, after a few moments' pause. 'Suffice it to say that it suited *my* purposes that she should receive the Virgin's Kiss,' he added, in an ominous tone and with a sombre countenance: 'but at the very instant that I was bearing her away through the intense darkness into which the church had been suddenly plunged, some one encountered me violently and tore *the intended victim* from my arms. My dagger was drawn in a moment; but, wielded as it was in the midst of the deep darkness, the blow failed—and the weapon broke. Almost at the same instant I was struck down senseless by the hand of my opponent. When I came to myself again, I was lying stretched upon the steps of the altar, in the midst of a profound silence and a deep darkness. Fearful of being discovered and captured by the Taborites, I rose and dragged myself away. Rejoining those who had been acting in concert with me, I learnt from their lips enough to convince me that the individual who rescued *the intended victim*, and who struck me down in the darkness, was Sir Sir Ernest de Colmar. Yes—he was seen issuing from the church with the girl in his arms; and there is not a shadow of a doubt that his hand dealt the blow which has left its ignominious mark upon my brow.'

'But Sir Ernest de Colmar knows not that it was you, holy father, whose antagonist he thus became in the darkness?' said the Baron of Altendorf, inquiringly.

'No—*that* is scarcely possible,' answered the priest. 'But his presence within the precincts of Zitzka's encampment was at least suspicious: his appearance in the church was an incident more remarkable still;—and the promptitude, energy, and determination with which he rescued *the intended victim* complete the aggregate of unaccountable circumstances. It is true that the whole series of events might have been accidental so far as he was concerned: but on the other hand, they are equally calculated to fill my mind with misgivings.'

'Could the young woman whom he rescued have told him who you are?' demanded the Baron.

'No: for even if she were aware that it was I who was carrying her away in the first instance, she does not know me by the name of *Father Cyprian*," was the response.

The Baron was about to make some observation upon the singularity of the circumstance that the Austrian representative should have visited the Taborite encampment at all; but his lordship was interrupted by the entrance of the landlord.

'What news, Messer Templin?' demanded the Baron impatiently.

'His Excellency Sir Ernest de Colmar, envoy from the Sovereign Duke of Ausrtia, has arrived this evening at the Golden Falcon,' answered the landlord; 'and he has desired me to deliver to your lordship this packet of which his Excellency was the bearer.'

So soon as he had thus acquitted himself of his mission, Templin retired;—and the Baron hastened to break open the packet, the address on which he had already recognised to be in the handwriting of his son.

Having hurriedly glanced over the contents of the laconic note which the parcel contained, the Baron passed it without a comment to the Carthusian, who read the following lines:—

'BELOVED AND RESPECTED SIRE,

'The bearer of this, Sir Ernest de Colmar, did honor your Castle with his presence on his way to Prague. I saw enough of him to be well assured that he is a most worthy Knight and amiable gentleman, and most certainly calculated to grace the council at Prague, if such, as I suspect, be his destination. For as pleasant tidings fly fast, so have I reason to know that Sir Ernest de Colmar is all I now represent him; and in such light, my respected sire, will it be good to receive him.

Your dutiful son,
'RODOLPH.'

'This note speaks well of the Austrian,' said the priest, handing back the letter to the Baron; 'and your lordship's son writes with an emphasis and an authority——'

'Stay!' cried the Baron. 'Think you that in troublous times such as these, no precautions are adopted with regard to correspondence? A certain understanding exists between Rodolph and myself in that respect; and we shall soon be able to ascertain whether the meaning of this note be as it at present seems.'

Thus speaking, the Baron spread the letter flat upon the table, with the writing downward: then, with his finger, he moistened all the blank side of the paper with wine from the goblet which stood near him; and this singular process being finished, he took up the document and re-perused it hastily—while the Carthusian monk watched him in mingled curiosity and suspense.

'Ah! this is indeed different!' he exclaimed. 'Behold, good father, in what sense the letter reads now.'

The priest took the paper once more; and running his eyes hastily over it, he found that the contents had undergone an alteration which made them stand thus:—

'BELOVED AND RESPECTED SIRE,

'The bearer of this, Sir Ernest de Colmar, did *dis*honor your Castle with his presence on his way to Prague. I saw enough of him to be well assured that he is a most *un*worthy Knight and *un*amiable gentleman, and most certainly calculated to *dis*grace the council at Prague, if such, as I suspect, be his destination. For as *un*pleasant tidings fly fast, so have I reason to know that Sir Ernest de Colmar is all I now represent him; and in such light, my respected sire, will it be good to receive him.

Your dutiful son,

'RODOLPH.'

'Now, indeed, have we good reason to mistrust this crafty, wily, treacherous Austrian!' exclaimed Father Cyprian. 'It is evident that Lord Rodolph has not only heard evil tidings concerning him, but has likewise seen just and sufficient reason to look upon him with suspicion. To what object the Knight's perfidious policy may tend, it is at present impossible for us to determine—scarcely to conjecture: but your lordship will agree with me that, while we treat him with an outward air of courtesy, we must maintain a strict watch upon him in private.

'Such is the course which we will adopt, holy father,' answered the Baron. 'When do you propose to present yourself to the Knight and introduce him to the Princess?'

'To-morrow morning,' returned the priest, rising from his chair and drawing his cowl completely over his face.

'Where do yo intend to pass the night?' demanded the Baron of Altendorf. 'Would it not be wise to repose yourself until the morrow beneath this roof?'

'No, my lord,' was the reply: it is absolutely necessary that I should repair without delay to Hamelen Castle.'

And, having thus spoken, Father Cyprian took his departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE JOURNEY.

CLOUDLESS was the blue sky of morning and refulgent, too, was the mighty arch of heaven with the golden radience of the sun. The blushing flowers, refreshed with moistening dew, sent forth their odors upon the zephyr-breath; and beautiful in their emerald pride were the shrubs and trees of the garden on which the casements of Sir Ernest de Colmar's apartment opened.—Rich fruitage gemmed the boughs; and the varied hues of a bright floral richness embroidered the parterres and borders with nature's own choicest arabesques.

It was about nine o'clock; the two pages had obtained leave to sally forth and view the public buildings, monuments and curiosities of the Bohemian capital; and Sir Sir Ernest de Colmar was busily employed in continuing certain despatches which he had commenced on the previous evening after his long discourse with worthy Messer Templin, the landlord.

Presently the door of the apartment opened—and Father Cyprian made his appearance.

The monk was attired in precisely the same manner as when the Knight first saw him; the coarse Carthusian gown enveloped his fine and naturally commanding form;—the rosary and scourge were suspended to the cord which girt his waist—and the cowl was drawn just so far over his countenance as to conceal his forehead.

On entering the room he darted a rapid and searching glance at Sir Ernest de Colmar, in order to assure himself by the Knight's manner, whether he in any way suspected who his antagonist might have been in the profound darkness of the church when Gloria was rescued: but so frank, ingenuous, and honest was the welcome which our hero instantaneously gave the priest, that all uncertainty on that head was at once set at rest. It was quite evident that the Knight had not recognized him among the tombs, nor had subsequently received any hint or intimation to arouse a suspicion relative to his complicity in the scene of attempted abduction which followed.

'Has your Excellency well considered all that passed between us on a certain occasion?' inquired the Carthusian, when the usual greetings were exchanged.

'Methought that we arrived at a perfect understanding on every point,' said De Colmar. 'It remains but for your Reverence to fulfil a certain condition——'

'For which purpose I now stand before you,' interrupted the priest. 'The Princess

Elizabetha has already been apprised of the discourse which has taken place between your Excellency and me; and she has consented to favor your Excellency with an audience this very forenoon. I am now ready to escort you into the presence of her Royal Highness.'

'I presume from your observation that the abode of the Princess is not at any very great distance?' observed the Knight, as he carefully deposited his half-finished despatches in a cupboard, the key of which he secured about his person.

'Follow me,' said the Carthusian, without giving a direct answer to the question implied by De Colmar's remark.

They quitted the Golden Falcon together; and the priest led the way to the southern gate of the city. It was by this same postern that Sir Ernest had entered Prague on the preceding evening—for it communicated with the high road along which his journey had lain. But instead of pursuing that wide and open route, the priest turned abruptly off to the left, and skirted the outworks of the fortification for the distance of nearly a mile. De Colmar followed close behind; and not a syllable was exchanged until they entered a thick grove, through which a narrow pathway ran tortuously amidst the trees.

'Pause we here for a few minutes, Sir Knight,' said the ecclesiastic, stopping short the moment they set foot on that beaten path. 'It is necessary that we come to some little understanding on a point which I did not choose to discuss at the hostel, where eaves-droppers might have indulged their impertinent curiosity.'

'Speak frankly and without reserve,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Your Excellency will pardon me,' resumed Father Cyprian, with a slight degree of embarassment in his tone, 'if I remind you of certain words which I uttered when we met at the chapel in the cross-roads. I then said that without me your illustrious master could do nothing in Bohemia—no, nor even discover the retreat of the Princess Elizabetha—nor obtain the slightest clue to the spot where her vast fortune is deposited.'

'I remember your observations well,' said the Knight.

'And do they suggest to your Excellency's mind no conditions which I am bound to stipulate and impose?'

'Your Reverence doubtless requires a solemn promise from my lips,' said De Colmar, 'that under no circumstances will I reveal, without your permission, the place of her Royal Highness's retreat. This assurance I unhesitatingly give.'

'Your Excellency has shot the arrow tolerably near the mark,' rejoined the ecclesiastic: 'but you have not quite reached the centre of my meaning. In plain terms,' he added, assuming the firm and decisive tone of a man who suddenly throws off all restraint—'these are times when the utmost caution, prudence, and circumspection are necessary. We should not only be careful whom we trust, but likewise obtain every possible guarantee that our confidence will not be abused. Now, your Excellency will admit that I am taking a step of no mean importance when I propose to conduct you to the asylum—the secret asylum,' he added emphatically, 'to which misfortune has driven this unfortunate Princess.'

'Unbosom yourself freely to me, holy father,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar: 'for I perceive that you require at my hands some security which you deem more binding than my mere word. Be it so: I am a stranger to your reverence—and the troubles of your country may have naturally made you suspicious. What guarantee can I afford you that the place of her Royal Highness's abode, shall, under any circumstances, be retained inviolably secret by me?'

'The guarantee which I demand is, that you consent to be blindfolded while repairing hence to the abode of the Princess, and while returning hither when the interview shall have taken place;'—and, as Father Cyprian uttered these words, he fixed his eyes intently upon De Colmar's countenance, as if to read the manner in which the strange proposal would be received.

'By heaven!' ejaculated the Knight, his cheeks coloring and his eyes flashing fire: 'under any other circumstances, such a demand would be looked upon as a fragrant insult——'

'Then let us terminate our interview at once,' said the priest, coldly.

'Not so!' replied Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a milder tone. 'I accept your proposal—I accede to your demand—because I am bound to make any personal sacrifice for the sake of forwarding the interests of my ducal master—and also because I am willing to prove by my deeds the sincerity of those which ere now conveyed an assurance of secrecy. But since your Reverence has decided upon treating the whole affair so pointedly and essentially as a matter of business, in which due guarantee shall be taken, while mere verbal pledges are regarded as naught—viewing the subject of negotiation in such a light, I say, methinks there remains a certain stipulation on my side——'

'Name it!' ejaculated the priest, impatiently.

'I mean,' cried the Knight,' that when the interview shall have taken place between

her Royal Highness and myself, it will behave you to afford me ocular proof of the existence of that ample dowry which is to become her's on her bridal day. For a Princess without a throne and without a fortune would be no desirable match for my master, Duke Albert of Austria.'

'Your stipulation shall be granted,' Sir Knight,' said Father Cyprian, after a few moments' profound reflection. 'There is now no point of difference between us—and may at once proceed with the business which we have in hand. Follow me.'

With these words the Carthusian led the way along the path for upwards of two hundred yards, when a small cemetery suddenly broke upon the view of the Knight as he followed close in his companion's footsteps.

Nothing could be more picturesque than this burial-ground embosomed in the depths of the silent grove. The crosses and tombstones—mute but eloquent memorials of the traveller's journey through life—were interspersed amidst knots o. cypresses and beneath the umbrageous foliage of wide-spreading yews; and the light and shade, so strangely blended, appeared emblematical of the joys and sorrows which marked the career of those who now slept beneath.

The Carthusian led the way through this picturesque cemetery, crossing himself with apparent devotion more than once; and on gaining the farther extremity, he turned abrubtly round the angle of a little chapel which stood in that part of the burial-ground.

Behind the building a middle-aged man, attired as a groom, was holding two horses ready caparisoned; and under his arm he carried a bundle which looked like a roll of cloth. This he handed to the priest without uttering a word, and then instantaneously withdrew—plunging into the adjacent thickets of the grove.

Father Cyprian lost no time in unrolling the parcel which he had received from the groom, and which proved to be a monk's gown. He then requested Sir Ernest de Colmar to assume that garb; and when the Knight had complied with the demand, the Carthusian made him doff his plumed cap and hold it in his hand beneath the folds of the ecclesiastical dress. Father Cyprian drew the cowl or hood completely over our hero's face in such a manner that, while permitting the free circulation of the fresh air, it altogether intercepted the Knight's view.

These arrangements having been perfected, Father Cyprian aided De Colmar, who was so effectually blindfolded, to mount one of the horses: he himself bestrode the other—and as the Knight's steed was provided with a single guiding rein, in addition to the other, the priest was enabled to conduct the animal, even at a rapid pace, by riding abreast of his companion and holding the single rein in his hand.

In this manner they proceeded at a smart trot, but without exchanging a word. Sir Ernest de Colmar could tell when they emerged from the grove, because the straggling branches overhanging the path were disturbed by his form as he rode along; and when this was no longer the case he knew that they were beyond the wood.—Besides, the breeze blew freshly in the fields and agitated the folds of his long garment. But presently his guide led him into another grove: and then the open country was gained once more.

Suddenly it struck Sir Ernest de Colmar that the Carthusian was purposely lengthening a short journey—or rather that he was doubling or trebling the distance necessary to be accomplished—by various zig-zag and circuitous windings; and the moment that this suspicion flashed across his mind, he became keenly sensitive to every little indication or minute circumstance which might aid in corroborating the idea. Thus, in a very short time, he became aware that the priest made the horse turn abruptly *to the left* out of a beaten road—scamper across the fields to a considerable distance, but gradually winding *to the right* all the while—and then actually regain the road once more, at a point not so very remote from the one whence the divergence took place.

By a skilful horseman like Sir Ernest de Colmar, this manœuvre was soon recognised and comprehended, blindfolded though he was; and several other little incidents, which would however be tedious to detail, served to corroborate his suspicion that the priest was not only seeking to throw him out of all possible calculation as to the direction which they were taking, but likewise to make him believe that the place of the Princess Elizabetha's retreat was much farther from Prague than it really was.

The first point was assuredly gained with full success: for the Knight could not form the least conjecture as to whether he was being led northward, southward, eastward, or westward—because he had lost all reckoning when in the tortuous pathway of that portion of the grove which lay beyond the cemetery;—but in respect to the second object which the Carthusian had in view, Sir Ernest speedily comprehended the manœuvre, as already described.

For upwards of an hour and a half did the ride continue. At length they halted for a few moments, while a massive gate swung round upon its hinges—and then

the horses' hoofs rung upon the stone pavement. The huge portal closed behind them; and the place of destination was gained.

'Permit me to unbutton your cowl, Sir Knight,' said the Carthusian, when they had both dismounted.

The hood was accordingly withdrawn from De Colmar's countenance; and, while casting off the ecclesiastical garb altogether, the rapid glance which he threw around showed him that he had alighted in the middle of a spacious court-yard, constituting a complete square, and enclosed on each side by a lofty range of building.

The entire structure, which was regular and uniform, presented a noble and imposing appearance to the eye. The frontages looking upon the court-yard were of the finest marble: the windows were of that long, arched, and deeply-set Gothic shape which was usually adopted in the palaces and mansions of mediæval architecture;—and the casements were fitted with stained glass, so that it was impossible for the eye to penetrate into the interior of the apartment.

Two pages in elegant attire were holding the horses by the bridles when the cowl fell away from Sir Ernest de Colmar's face: and two more pages, similarly dressed, were standing upon the threshold of a door opening into a spacious hall. Thither the Carthusian at once conducted the Knight; and the two pages last alluded to immediately led the way up a wide marble staircase ornamented with large porcelain vases containing the choicest flowers, and with alabaster statues holding lamps in their hands.

The landing to which this superb ascent led, was carpeted with crimson velvet; the walls were covered with pictures set in gorgeous frames, and the subjects of which were drawn from the most striking episodes in Bohemian history. Vases, statues, and flowers likewise enhanced the attractions and added to the chaste elegance of the place.

From each side of this landing a long passage branched off; and into one of these corridors did the pages conduct the Carthusian and the Knight. To the priest, however, the scene was evidently familiar: for he bestowed not a single glance on any of the numerous objects of curiosity and art which were so lavishly scattered about: and in one part of the corridor he crossed himself rapidly though without looking either to the right or to the left. But in a small niche Sir Ernest de Colmar beheld a crucifix the exact position of which must have been well known to the priest, who had made the Christian sign the instant that he was passing it; and thus, from this as well as from other circumstances, was it apparent enough that Father Cyprian was no stranger in this magnificent dwelling.

When near the extremity of the passage, the pages threw a pair of folding-doors wide open; but they immediately closed again, swinging back noiselessly upon their hinges, so soon as the Knight and the Carthusian had passed into an elegantly-furnished ante-chamber, where four beautiful young women, attired in the plain though becoming garb of servitresses, were engaged with tambor work.

The pages had remained outside in the passage: but one of these handmaidens instantly rose from her seat—threw open a door at the end of the ante-room—drew back the heavy velvet curtain which covered the entrance—and stepped aside for Father Cyprian and Sir Ernest de Colmar to cross the threshold. They advanced accordingly: the curtain was drawn again—the door was closed behind them;—and the Knight found himself in a magnificently-furnished apartment, at the extremity of which there was a raised seat whence a young lady of dazzling beauty rose to welcome the visitors.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRINCESS ELIZABETHA.

THE room to which Sir Ernest de Colmar had thus been introduced, was, as we have just observed, splendidly fitted up. The window-panes were of pink glass; but while they precluded the possibility of catching a glimpse of the prospect without, they afforded a medium through which the sun-beams poured a subdued and roseate lustre into the apartment.

The dais, or raised part of the room, where the young lady had been seated, was covered with velvet of a gorgeous violet-color, fringed with gold: the draperies were of white figured satin, which borrowed a ruddy tint from the stained glass;—the floor was of the most curious and costly mosaic work:—and on the walls, which were of richly painted wainscotting, armorial bearings were emblazoned and inlaid with silver, gold, and mother-of-pearl.

The young lady who occupied this superb apartment, was the Princess Elizabetha.

Of tall stature and sylph-like form, her figure was at once graceful, elegant, and striking. The waist was slender, almost to a fault: the bust was of moderate proportions, showing all the exquisitively gradient and not too abrupt transitions from

the convex to the conclave tendencies, and rising with an easy and insensible swell.

The neck of the Princess was long and tapering, and arched grandly. Her complexion was fair—the freshness, fineness, and animation of the skin denoting a vigorous health, in spite of the cares and misfortunes which had overtaken her. Indeed, her cheeks had all the brightness of bloom which characterises a brunette, but united in this instance with ivory fairness.

Her eyes were of a deep blue—crowned with brows delicately pencilled, and animated with an expression of voluptuousness to which a tinge of melancholy imparted a new and ineffable charm. Her hair was of a rich brown, and formed a glossy and magnificent frame for a forehead of noble height and snowy stainlessness: her mouth was small, and just sufficiently pouting to invest the lower part of the countenance with that slightly sensual expression which the upper portion derived from the eyes.—At the same time, there was nothing gross in the entire mien and look of that beauteous face: all that could be said was that it conveyed the impression of one well fitted by nature and instinct to love and be beloved.

The attire of this charming Princess corresponded with her own beauty and with the tasteful elegance characterising the apartment. The period of mourning at that time prescribed for the loss of a parent was six months: and this interval having just expired, her Royal Highness was clad in a manner becoming her rank, her loveliness, and her wealth. In a word, her appearance altogether justified the panegyric which the priest had drawn in regard to her personal fascinations: and Sir Ernest de Colmar experienced therefore no disappointment in this respect.

There was a kind of musical grace in her step, as she advanced a few paces to receive the Knight and the Carthusian. To the former she made a courteous inclination of the head, accompanied by that half curtsey which so exquisitely becomes the faultless figure, every movement of which has its own peculiar charm: then, turning towards the priest, she said in a voice of perfect melody, 'Welcome, holy father, to my retreat.'

'I give thee my blessing, daughter,' responded the ecclesiastic; 'and may the good Saints grant that the present interview shall result to thine advantage and benefit,' added Father Cyprian, glancing from the Princess towards Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'It assuredly rests with her Royal Highness to command her own destiny,' said the Knight, in an emphatic tone and with a meaning look alike at Elizabetha and the Carthusian: so that the former immediately comprehended that her beauty had produced a favorable impression upon the representative of the Sovereign Duke of Austria—while the latter understood that Sir Ernest was prepared to send a propitious report of the royal lady's charms to his illustrious master at Vienna.

A deep blush suddenly suffused itself over the countenance of the Princess; and, turning aside, she affected to play for a few moments with the fan of ostrich plumes which she held in one of her fair hands. The Carthusian walked to the farther extremity of the room, where he seated himself and apparently fell into a deep reverie: but Sir Ernest, comprehending that the priest was desirous of affording him an opportunity of conversing unrestrainedly with Elizabetha, immediately accosted her.

She placed herself upon a sofa—at the same time waving her fan towards a chair, thereby intimating that Sir Ernest de Colmar was honored by permission to take a seat in her presence: for in those times, as indeed at the present day, a silly, ridiculous, and nauseating etiquette maintained a wide line of demarcation between royal personages and all the rest of the community.

Seating himself, therefore, the Knight said in a low and touching tone of unfeigned sincerity, 'Your Highness will believe that it is no idle compliment when I declare that the spectacle of beauty in distress, though at all times calculated to move the heart, is doubly afflicting in the present instance. Left an orphan at so tender an age—deprived of the crown which is your inheritance—compelled to immure yourself in seclusion—and racked with the painful conviction that your country is a prey to anarchy—your Royal Highness is placed in a position which excites my deepest sympathy. And remember, Princess, that I speak not merely on my own behalf as a Christian man and a true Knight—but also on that of my master, the Duke Albert of Austria.

'And I thank you, Sir Ernest de Colmar,' said Elizabetha, the tears streaming down her cheeks,—'I thank you,' she repeated, in a voice half suffocated with sobs,—'not only for the sympathy which you express towards me on account of the Sovereign Prince whose representative you are, but likewise for the kind words which your own generous feelings have prompted you to utter.

'Royal lady,' observed the Knight, 'it were a ridiculous affectation on my part, and a poor compliment towards *your* good sense, to ask if you be aware of the motive and object which have this day procured me the honor of an interview with your

Highness. I will therefore at once and frankly demand of you whether it be by your own free will, consent, and good pleasure, that certain negotiations have been opened on your behalf with the Duke of Austria?'

While giving utterance to the concluding portion of this sentence, the Knight glanced towards the priest who was seated at the farther extremity of the spacious apartment: and he was struck, almost startled, by the expression with which the monk's eyes glared from within the depths of his hood, as they were fixed intently upon the countenance of the Princess.

Those eyes were, however, withdrawn the moment they met the looks of de Colmar; and the Carthusian, hastily averting his head, drew the cowl farther over his features. At this same instant the Knight turned towards Elizabetha, and caught her glance just as it quitted the spot where the monk was seated. A deep blush spread over her features: and, quick as lightning, did the idea strike Sir Ernest that she was ashamed at having been detected in yielding to the influence which the priest exercised with regard to her, and which enabled him to warn or prompt her even by his very looks how she was to act and speak.

'Princess,' said the Knight, leaning forward and sinking his voice to so low a tone that his words could not possibly reach Father Cyprian's ears, 'I implore you to answer me without restraint and without reserve. Is it by your own free will that these negotiations have been opened respecting the bestowal of your hand on Albert of Austria?—are you your own mistress within these walls?—is this a safe asylum of your own choosing, or a prison whence you would gladly escape? Tell me—tell me, royal lady,' added de Colmar, emphatically, 'in what manner I can serve you: for I fear that you are not even so happy as you might be——'

'Yes—yes, Sir Knight—I am happy—as happy as I can ever hope to be in this world,' interrupted the Princess: but, as she gave utterance to these words, the large pearly tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.

Sir Ernest de Colmar gazed upon her with looks expressive of deep sympathy and boundless compassion: for he felt convinced that the unfortunate young lady was not altogether a free agent, but that some species of coercion was exercisad over her. Whether this amounted to an actual tyranny or was merely the sway of that influence which an intriguing priest was likely to obtain over the mind of an orphan girl left friendless at so tender an age,—whether, in fact, Father Cyprian had openly asserted his right to control her actions, or was wont merely to exercise a tacit though not the less oppressive despotism over her mind by craftily working on her fears,—the Knight was unable to determine: and while he was still gazing upon her with an expression of mournful interest in his looks, he observed that she cast a rapid, furtive, and shuddering glance towards the monk.

'Lady,' he said in a lower and more earnest tone than before, 'you are a great Princess—and I am but a humble Knight: it is only by sufferance, therefore, that I am permitted the honor of addressing a few words to your ear. But I beseech and pray you to regard me as the representative of Albert of Austria—as the envoy of a Sovereign Prince who will cheerfully and gladly espouse the cause of the orphan and the friendless daughter of Wenzel. In this light must you regard me—and not as a mere stranger. Speak to me, then, without reserve. If you have wrongs to redress—complaints to make—succor to demand, your voice will not be raised in vain. Tell me that you are a prisoner here—and my sword shall cleave for your Royal Highness a path to immediate freedom; tell me that any living soul seeks to coerce you—and I will call the cowardly tyrant to an immediate account. But do not tell me that you are happy, royal lady—because your looks proclaim the reverse.'

With a deep—an absorbing attention had the Princess Elizabetha listened to these words which the Knight uttered in a tone of such unfeigned and heartfelt sincerity: and the tears rolled faster down her cheek.

Shudderingly did she again glance towards the monk; and a glare of even horror flashed in her large blue eyes, as Father Cyprian rose suddenly—almost impatiently from his seat, and advanced towards the dais.

'Daughter,' he said endeavoring to render his voice as kind, conciliatory, and reassuring as possible, 'you will do well to give his Excellency speedy answers to any questions which in his wisdom he may think fit to put to your Highness.'

'On the contrary,' exclaimed the Knight, 'it were better that the Princess should have more leisure to ponder upon the negotiations which you, Father Cyprian, have somewhat prematurely opened in her behalf.'

'What! has her Royal Highness——'

And the monk suddenly stopped short in the midst of the sentence that he had begun in a tone of excitement and imperiousness which completely confirmed de Colmar's suspicion relative to the undue and coercive influence which he exercised over the unfortunate Princess.

'It were as well, holy father,' said the Knight, in a reproachful tone, 'that this interview should terminate at once. Behold—it is already most painful to her Highness' he added, turning his eyes upon Elizabetha, who was vainly endeavoring to control the feelings which the generous and touching language of Sir Ernest de Colmar had so deeply excited.

'Your Excellency will pardon me,' exclaimed the monk, 'if I remind you that, situated as her Royal Highness is, it would be imprudent and dangerous for her to grant you another interview for the mere sake of giving you those assurances which can be so easily afforded on the present occasion. Permit me to say one word to her Highness—and then, I have no doubt, this interview may be forthwith brought to a speedy and satisfactory close.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar glanced towards the Princess's countenance: but he read no sign there which told him whether to depart or remain;—she had regained her self-possession—her courage; though so nearly akin was this composure to the dull apathy of despair, that her demeanor was frozen—her beauty had suddenly become glacial.

De Colmar, scarcely knowig how to act, turned aside for a few moments in order to allow the priest an opportunity of speaking a word in Elizabetha's ear according to the intimation which he had given: and Father Cyprian, availing himself of the opportuniy, hastily bent down his head until the cowl which overshadowed all the upper part of his face touched the glossy, shining hair of the youthful Princess.

'Elizabetha,' whispered the monk, in a rapid and imperious tone,' 'I command you to give this Austrian the assurances which he requires. Remember——'

'Silence—silence!' said the Princess, with that subdued ejaculation which when given in a hoarse and hollow whisper explains the heart's horror far more significantly than the loudest shriek: 'silence!' she repeated, glancing appealingly up into the stern countenance that was rendered more menacing still by the dark shade of the cowl. 'Let this interview end *now*, I implore you! In a few days—perhaps tomorrow—I shall be better prepared to receive this Austrian Knight——'

'No—no,' interrupted Father Cyprian savagely: 'it suits me not to bring him hither a dozen times in obedience to your caprices——'

'Caprices!' murmured the Princess, darting upon the monk a look of mingled reproach and anger: '*feelings* you would have said?'

'No—caprices,' he reiterated; 'and beware how you trifle with me, Elizabetha!'

'Trifle with you!' exclaimed the Princess, but not in a tone loud enough to be heard by the Knight: and as she spoke, her countenance crimsoned with indignation.

'By the Saints! you are determined to anger me, perverse and obstinate girl!' said the monk. 'But you shall do my bidding, Elizabetha—you shall do my bidding, I tell you,' he repeated, in a tone of concentrated rage and menace. 'Remember your oath! remember the spell which makes you my slave—my instrument! *When the silver bell tinkles at midnight*——'

'Enough—enough!' murmured the wretched girl, with a palsied tremor on the lip, a wild glaring in the eyes, and an ashy paleness on the countenance—as if those last words which the priest uttered were fraught with a mystic horror or else awoke memories that shot through her brain with the lancinating effect of a poroxysm of ineffable anguish. 'Say no more, Father Cyprian—say no more,' she whispered hurriedly, at the expiration of a few instants: 'I will tranquillise myself—I will give the assurances which you have already dictated——'

'Thanks—a thousand thanks!' whispered the monk, his features now lighting up with joy: then, turning towards de Colmar, he said, 'Sir Knight, her Royal Highness, having recovered from that confusion and excitement into which the important considerations associated with your Excellency's visit had so naturally plunged her, is now prepared to give those assurances which your Excellency requires as a preliminary to the settlement of the compact in all other respects agreed upon between us.'

But while Father Cyprian was pronouncing this long sentence in a measured tone, his object being to afford the Princess a few moments' leisure to regain her self-possession, the glance which Sir Ernest de Colmar threw upon her countenance couvinced him that she was yielding only to intimidation. For there was something unnatural and forced in the very composure which she assumed—something terrible to contemplate in the lips so tightly compressed that they could not quiver and the bosom that remained upheaved with the suspended breath consequent on the violence put upon feelings which demanded a vent!

'Royal lady,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, darting a look of mingled indignation and abhorrence upon the priest, 'my worst fears are now confirmed—and I can no longer entertain the slightest doubt that your Highness is *not* a free agent.'

'I beseech your Excellency to confine yourself to the motive and object of this

interview,' said the Princess, speaking in a slow and measured tone, as if the mere fact of yielding to any higher degree of excitement must be followed by an outburst of tears. 'You have demanded whether certain negotiations were opened with my free will and pleasure—and—and,' she added, with the utmost difficulty stifling a sob,—'I reply to you in the affirmative—I give you the assurances which you require.—Farewell, Sir Knight!'

And having thus spoken, the Princess Elizabetha hurried from the room by a small door in the immediate vicinity of the dais.

'Now must your Excellency confess that you are satisfied,' exclaimed the priest, triumphantly; but, on darting a penetrating glance upon de Colmar's countenance, Father Cyprian beheld in the Knight's looks nothing that was either reasuring or encouraging in respect to his own projects.

'Let us depart hence,' said de Colmar, in a cold, haughty, and even imperious tone.

But as he turned towards the door by which they had entered the apartment, the monk cast upon him a look so full of deadly hate and fiend-like malignity that had Sir Ernest perceived it, brave as he was he would have trembled.

The velvet curtain was drawn back—the door flew open to his touch—and he traversed the ante-chamber where the handmaidens were occupied with their tambor-work. The priest followed close behind; and dark, diabolical, sinister in the extreme, was now the expression which rendered absolutely hideous the naturally very handsome countenance of that designing Carthusian. He was evidently revolving some infernal scheme in his mind; and he pulled the cowl farther over his features as if to draw a veil upon his thoughts.

The two pages who had served as an escort to the door of that ante-chamber, were waiting in the passage, along which they now preceded the Knight towards the landing. This was traversed—the magnificent marble staircase was descended—and the hall below was reached.

Hitherto a profound silence had been maintained from the moment the Knight and the priest quitted the apartment of the Princess. But now the Carthusian, catching Sir Ernest de Colmar by the sleeve of his doublet, said in a low tone 'Your Excellency has seen the Princess—and her lips have given you an assurance which in plain terms implies that she will accept the suit of your illustrious master, Albert of Austria. Will it not, therefore, please you to behold the treasures constituting the fortune of her Royal Highness, and the will by which his late Majesty entrusted her to my guardianship?'

'Yes—the will!' ejaculated the Knight: then, after a moment's reflection, he said, 'I thank you for reminding me of this. Lead the way—I am ready to follow your Reverence.'

Father Cyprian made a sign to the pages, who instantly retired. He then opened a low door which stood concealed in the shade beneath the immense marble staircase; and a flight of steps appeared, leading down into deep darkness.

'I will thank your Excellency to close the door behind you,' said the priest, as he led the way by commencing the descent of the stone stairs.

For a moment a suspicion of treachery flashed across the mind of Sir Ernest de Colmar; and he hesitated on the threshold. But in another instant he felt ashamed of the fear to which he had thus yielded, evanescent though it were; and he began to follow the priest, shutting the door at the head of the steps.

Total darkness now prevailed—a darkness unrelieved by the faintest glimmering.

'Descend fearlessly, Sir Knight,' said the Carthusian: 'the steps are regular, even, and in good condition—and there is no danger of stumbling. In a few minutes I shall be enabled to procure a light.'

Sir Ernest descended with a firm step, and reached the bottom of the flight. Extending his arms with the natural impulse animating an individual in the dark, his hands encountered a rough wall on either side; and as the priest's sandals echoed from a short distance a-head as he still led the way, the Knight knew that they were in a long subterranean passage about four feet wide.

But scarcely had he advanced a dozen paces from the bottom of the flight of steps, when something descended with a heavy iron clang behind him; and before the tremendous echo thus raised had died away, a second object fell with a similar din a short distance in front,—the loud metallic sounds reverberating rapidly along the vaulted passage.

'Treachery!' ejaculated the Knight, springing forward: but his way was barred by a massive iron grating which stretched across the subterranean from wall to wall, and from floor to roof.

Animated with a horrible suspicion, he turned and endeavored to retrace his steps towards the flight of stone stairs: but in that direction also was he suddenly stopped short—and by a similar grating.

Then the horrible suspicion was confirmed in a moment; and he knew that he was a prisoner in a cage formed by the two

gratings each of which had dropped like a portcullis from an aperture in the vaulted roof.

And as if to enhance the horror of his thoughts, the Carthusian priest exclaimed in a loud sonorous tone, which coming from the deep darkness appeared like the voice of doom,—'Another victim for the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss!'

Then a door opened far down the passage, and clanged again with violence immediately afterwards; and, when the echoes had died away, a profound and death-like silence, as well as a stupendous darkness, prevailed in the subterranean.

CHAPTER XV.

MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY.

We have before stated that Sir Ernest de Colmar was brave as man could be; but when he found himself thus suddenly and treacherously inveigled into a snare—and when those ominous words rang in his startled ears—a cold tremor seized upon him, and an icy perspiration broke forth upon his noble brow.

For although he entertained not the slightest idea of what could be meant by a victim to the Bronze Statue—much less what was signified by the Virgin's Kiss,—he had nevertheless heard those phrases proclaimed on a former occasion, and under circumstances which proved that they expressed something ineffably terrible. He remembered how horrified and how rending was the shriek which the mysterious words had evoked from Gloria's lips in the church: and he recollected how full of anguish and poignant alarm did her bosom seem when he questioned her in the grove relative to the meaning of the darkly significant sentence. And now, too, as Father Cyprian's voice still rang his ears, it struck him that it was the same sonorous tone which had menaced Gloria with the same doom; and for the first time did the conviction spring up in his soul that it was the Carthusian himself of whom he had caught a glimpse amongst the tombs, and who had thundered forth the words which wrung the scream from Gloria's lips. That it was also this identical ecclesiastic whom he had struck down in the darkness and from whose arms he had rescued the beauteous girl, likewise seemed probable to our hero: but upon this point there was nothing certain.

And that menaced doom which had been proclaimed to Gloria in his hearing and which was now so mysteriously announced to himself,—what could it be?—what could it mean? Were those words in any way associated with he beautiful statue which he had seen at Altendorf Castle?—and if so, did the connexion proceed farther still and extend to the frightful machinery which he had beheld at the same place? Oh! there was some tremendous mystery involved in the words—*The Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss*: but what the signification should be, was a question defying all possible conjecture!

Such were the thoughts which swept through the mind of Sir Ernest de Colmar within the first few minutes after he found himself a prisoner in the dark subterranean.

Folding his arms across his breast, he leant against the rough wall and began to reflect calmly and courageously on his position. But the certainty that he was a captive in the vault of some splendid mansion the name and situation of which were alike unknown to him,—and that he was menaced with a doom the nature of which was no doubt horrible, but completely undefined,—these were the paramount ideas whereon he had to fix his attention. All else was involved in the deepest mystery and the most ominous gloom.

But whatever were the fate in store for him, the Knight resolved to meet it with firmness; or rather, he knew that he should do so without coming to any determination at all upon the subject: for his was a physical bravery based upon the strongest moral coutage; and it was as impossible for human power to dim the light of the glorious sun as to reduce the magnanimous soul of Sir Ernest de Colmar to the grovelling condition of cowardice.

Profound was the silence which continued in the subterranean. That the ecclesiastic had quitted the vault by the door which clanged at the further extremity almost immediately after the consummation of his treacherous deed, was tolerably certain. But how long would his absence last?—and during the interval was there no possibility of escape?

Sir Ernest de Colmar tried the gratings with his hands. They were formed of massive iron bars; and on each side they fitted into grooves in the wall. By the aid of the cross-bars he climbed up one of them; and he found as he had previously suspected, that it had descended from an opening in the vaulted roof, the highest portion of which was about seven feet from the paved floor. So firmly fixed was each grating that the Knight's strong hand could not even shake them; and when he essayed to push one of them up, the attempt was as vain and useless as if he had

endeavored to hurl down the massive wall itself.

Thus was he a prisoner in a cage about four feet square—having two of its sides of solid masonry and the other two of stout iron bars.

Once more did Sir Ernest de Colmar fold his arms, lean against the wall, and give way to his reflections;—and in the train of the thoughts that passed through his mind, the mysteries of Altendorf Castle—Satanais and Gloria—the Carthusian monk—the Princess Elizabetha—and many associations respecting his own native land, far-off Austria—these were the prominent images and topics!

Hours passed away—and by degrees the idea stole into Sir Ernest de Colmar's mind that he was to be left to die the hideous death of starvation in that sepulchre of masonry and iron bars!

Could it be possible?—death through famine—death through hunger and thirst? Oh! no—no: fiends alone could inflict upon a human creature such an appalling doom! Besides, such a death could not be in any way associated with the Bronze Statue: and had not the Carthusian declared that he should become a victim thereto? Yet, was it not strange that no one came to him?—was it not darkly suspicious that Father Cyprian kept so long away? Hours had passed: it must now be night time—and still not a voice nor a footstep broke upon the silence, nor the gleam of a lamp upon the profound gloom of the subterranean!

But, after all, what interest could the Carthusian have in taking the life of Sir Ernest de Colmar?

Scarcely had our hero asked himself this question,—a question which now suddenly sprang up in his mind for the first time during the long weary hours that he had passed in his cage, when certain sounds, faint but unmistakable, struck upon his ear.

He held his breath—he stood motionless, to listen.

Yes: it was no delusion—no freak of the imagination; for the rustling of garments came through the intense darkness—as if human beings were creeping along with the treacherous stealthiness of snakes!

Sir Ernest de Colmar laid his hand upon his sword and half drew it from its sheath. But at the same instant other and less equivocal sounds absorbed those which had at first excited his attention; and the rattling of chains and the noise of revolving wheels made him aware that the iron gratings were being drawn up.

Should he endeavor to cut his way through the persons present, whoever they might be? Assuredly this was a plan on which the gallant de Colmar was not likely to reflect twice; and forth from its scabbard flew his trusty sword. But, quick as thought, he was seized upon from every side; strong arms were laid upon him in the midst of the profound darkness;—the very bars which had been drawn up appeared to have changed into iron hands to clutch him in a vice-like grasp.

One—two—three—four—five—six—heaven only knows how many there were thus to secure the brave Knight and render him powerless. His sword was wrenched from his grasp—his hands were fastened together with a cord—he was muffled in a priest's gown—the cowl was buttoned over his face, and he was then hurried along the passage in the midst of his unseen, unknown, silent oppressors.

Presently the party paused for a few moments—a door moaned upon its hinges—the hurried pace was continued—the massive portal clanged violently—and the echoes reverberated with loud, rapid, and metallic sound far, far along another subterranean. For that the route was continued through such a place those echoes plainly proved to the Knight's comprehension—while his own boots with the clinking golden spurs and the footsteps of the men who had him in their power sounded upon the stone-paved floor.

On they went—in silence and in darkness!

Had Sir Ernest de Colmar been a man possessing a weak mind accessible to the influence of superstition, he might have fancied that he was in the group of fiends who were speeding him on through a sable atmosphere and a dread subterranean path to the kingdom of Satan!

Suddenly a light glanced for a single instant across the opening of the cowl where it buttoned—appearing and disappearing with equal suddenness, as a solitary lamp in the middle of a long tunnel seems to the eyes of the railway-traveller. Another door groaned on its hinges—the party passed on—clang went the portal as it closed again—and still was de Colmar hurried on through a continuation of that subterranean which appeared interminable.

Ten minutes at least, as well as the Knight could reckon, had elapsed since the moment when he was released from his cage—and at the rate which had been pursued, this strange underground journey had already extended to nearly the distance of a mile.

Scarcely had Sir Ernest de Colmar made this computation, when the sounds of numerous footsteps, approaching from the opposite direction, fell upon his ears.

'Tis late! for the silver bell has already tinkled,' said one of the Knight's custodians, the profound silence being broken for the first time.

'Yes; the silver bell has tinkled,' observed the well known voice of the Carthusian, whom Sir Ernest found to be the individual that grasped his right arm. 'Let us stand back.'

The party stopped short and drew aside towards the wall.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps—and now numerous lights glanced meteor-like upon de Colmar's eyes through the slight opening in the cowl: but so small was this opening that he could not distinguish those who carried the lights. By their steps, however, he concluded that they were persons of the male sex.

Not a word was spoken: it seemed as if those who were passing neither recognised nor were seen by the party who had de Colmar in their charge; or if there were any recognition, it must have been by signs. The procession was numerous, consisting, as well as the Knight could possibly guess, of at least seventy or eighty persons; and this computation he knew could not be far wrong, inasmuch as his military experience had accustomed his ear to estimate the number of any body of men by their march.

All this was mystery accumulating upon mystery! What meant the observation that 'the silver bell had tinkled?—what meant the procession of many men through the long subterranean? and why was no word exchanged between them and the persons who had Colmar in their power? The latter, then, must be well known to the former thus to escape even an interrogatory respecting their business in that place and with a muffled prisoner in their custody? It was this consideration that prevented the Knight from demanding succour as the procession hastened by.

And now he was again hurried along by his custodians, but only for a short distance, ere a third door was opened; and, as it closed with a clanging sound behind, he was conducted up a flight of stone-steps, at the top of which there was another door. De Colmar was then led across a place which appeared to be a hall paven with marble—and in a few moments the party merged into the open air: for the fresh breeze agitated the ecclesiastical garb in which our hero was enveloped, and he heard the champing of bits in the mouths of horses.

The party paused—and de Colmar was made to mount one of the animals: but scarcely had his feet found their way into the stirrups when a cord, passing under the horse's belly, was fastened to his ankles; and although it was slack enough to permit him to ride with ease, it nevertheless held him fast as it were upon the animal's back and rendered escape apparently impossible.

His custodians being likewise mounted, the party rode off—passing through an arched gateway and over a draw-bridge, as Sir Ernest de Colmar could tell by the echoes raised in the former and the tramping of the animal's hoofs on the latter. Along a hard and gently sloping road they now pursued their route at a brisk trot—a profound silence being still maintained.

Scarcely had the Knight begun once more to breathe the fresh air of heaven, when he felt invigorated and encouraged. For in that subterranean passage there appeared not to be the slightest chance of escape: whereas in this wide and open road the case was not altogether so desperate.

And now let us endeavor to make our readers understand precisely how Sir Ernest de Colmar was sitaated.

When assailed so mysteriously by his unseen and unknown foes, on the drawing up of the portcullis-like gratings in the subterranean, a cord had been fastened to each wrist—and the two ropes, having been wound round his body, were tied together. The monkish gown was then huddled on him—add the cowl buttoned over his face. Such were the precautions adopted in the first instance, alike to render him powerless and obstruct his vision. Now he was seated on a horse from which he could not possibly slip off on account of the cord passing between his feet; and on each side of him rode three or four individuals, most probably well armed and at all events determined to allow him no chance of escape.

But scarcely was the draw-bridge passed, when Sir Ernest began an endeavor to extricate his hands from the cords which held them fast; and in about a quarter of an hour he had so far succeeded as to release his right arm. To emancipate the left was then only the work of a few moments: and when his hands were thus freed from bondage, he felt that half of his liberty was already accomplished.

All this time the horses were trotting briskly along the road—the animal which the Knight bestrode being guided by a single rein which the persons on his right retained; and thus his journey of the night to a considerable extent resembled that of the morning when on his way to the place of the Princess Elizabetha's abode.

Having succeeded in releasing his hands, in the manner already described, Sir Ernest de Colmar cautiously and carefully loosened one of the buttons of the cowl; for by thus partially opening the hood, he sought to ascertain the precise number of custodians—the way in which they were armed—the nature of the locality through which their route lay—and any other circumstances calculated to determine him how he should act in order to make the grand attempt for his complete emancipation from his enemies.

The moon shone with only a faint and fitful lustre; for the night was cloudy, and the heavens were somewhat threatening in their aspect. That the atmosphere was thus sombre was a fortunate circumstance for our hero, inasmuch as it prevented the opening which he had made in the cowl from being perceived by his custodians.

And now from within that dark hood the Knight looked forth. The first glance showed him the form of Father Cyprian riding on his right hand and holding the guiding rein of the steed which he himself bestrode; the second glance, which swept around more boldly and took a wider range, enabled de Colmar to observe that there were six persons in addition to the Carthusian.

But those six persons!—they were men armed to the teeth—and over their countenances they wore black masks!

Then to the brain of the Knight flashed the story which the landlord of the Golden Falcon had told him how the three brothers Schwartz had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared some years ago—and how rumors prevailed at the time that they had been seen and recognised in the custody of horsemen wearing black masks.

But the brothers Schwartz had disappeared in that unaccountable and suspicious manner when engaged in working at Hamelen Castle; and the presumption was that they had been made away with by the discharged operatives who were jealous of the favor shown to them. How, then, could *their* fate have aught prototypical of the position of Sir Ernest de Colmar? Was it at Hamelen Castle that he had fallen into the hands of his mysterious enemies? Such an idea could not be entertained for a moment; inasmuch as the Baroness had been represented to him as a lady utterly incapable of doing harm even to the meanest of her fellow-creatures. Nevertheless these men with their black masks appeared to furnish a strange and terribly romantic corroboration of the vague rumor which twelve years previously had been circulated respecting the three brothers Schwartz.

Diverting his mind, however, as speedily as he could from speculation and conjecture on these points, Sir Ernest de Colmar proceeded to scrutinise his companions as well as the feeble moonlight and the small opening in the hood would permit. On his right, we have already observed, rode the priest, abreast with whom were two of the armed horsemen: the other four were on the Knight's left hand. The Carthusian was evidently watching him with a lynx-eyed wariness; and thus was it certain that the first sign of an attempt to escape on his part would cause six gleaming brands to leap from their sheaths or as many battle-axes to be snatched from the saddle-bows of the armed horsemen.

Nevertheless, Sir Ernest de Colmar was resolved to make a grand effort to regain his liberty: and as the road lay through a wood, he calculated that if he could only succeed in plunging into the thicket, he might baffle pursuit. But the cord passing between his ankles, under the horse's belly—how was he to rid himself of that fettering bond?

Suddenly his mind was made up to the adoption of a bold and almost desperate course.

Carefully loosening the remainder of the buttons which kept the gown around him and the cowl over his face, he held the garment on with his hands, but in such a manner that he could throw it off in an instant. Watching his opportunity, he noticed when the Carthusian's eyes were for a moment turned in another direction; and with the speed of a lightning-flash, did Sir Ernest fling back the encumbering garb, and fell the priest from his horse with one tremendous blow of his clenched fist. Then dashing his spurs into the sides of the animal which he bestrode, he was borne away from the midst of the party like an arrow shot from a bow.

The daring character of the Knight's feat and the suddenness with which it was performed, evidently paralysed for a few moments the six armed men who accompanied the priest; and beholding this individual so abruptly stricken down, they reined their steeds with the instinctive apprehension of men who fancy that a companion or leader has unexpectedly and all in an instant met his death.

But raising himself from the ground, although with some difficulty, Father Cyprian—who was cruelly bruised and half stunned by the violent treatment he had just experienced—urged the men to instantaneous pursuit; and, being assisted to remount his steed, he encouraged his companions by liberal promises of reward

to exert every effort in order to recapture the fugitive.

This little delay was however so far serviceable to the Knight, that it enabled him, even while borne along with wirlwind speeed, to stoop down in such a manner that he succeeded in unfastening the end of the rope from his right leg: but scarcely had he accomplished this point, when the gallant horse which bestrode stumbled over a large stone in the road, and fell so abruptly that Sir Ernest de Colmar was unable to regain his feet ere the Carthusian with his party galloped up to the spot.

The armed men sprang from their steeds —surrounded the Knight—and made him their prisoner in a moment; for not only was his left foot entangled in the stirrup on account of the cord which was fastened to it —but he was likewise without any weapon of defence.

At this instant, however—when hope appeared altogether to abandon the gallant de Colmar—the sound of numerous horses' hoofs, coming from the opposite direction to that hitherto pursued by the Carthusian's party, were heard rapidly approaching.

'Gag him—bind him—and lose not a moment!' ejaculated the priest, in a voice denoting the excitement of a sudden terror lest assistance should be at hand to rescue his victim.

But inspired with an almost superhuman strength, Sir Ernest de Colmar resolved on making one more effort to baffle his enemies; and bursting away from those who held him in their powerful grasp, he sped towards the approaching horsemen.

Five of his persecutors were however immediately at his heels; for the many hours' privation of food which our hero had endured, had weakened his limbs so that he was easily overtaken;—and the priest, who had remained on horseback, galloped up to the spot, exclaiming, 'Cut him down if he dare resist us again.

Bnt, like the hunted lion that turns on its pursuers with the determination to sell its life as dearly as possible, Sir Ernest de Colmar suddenly faced about—sprang with irresistible fury on the foremost of the armed men—and wrenched from the villain's grasp the drawn sword that was already raised to cut him down.

Armed with this weapon, and once more inspired by a marvellous strength—the effect of his dauntless spirit,—the Knight succeeded in defending himself against the whole five assailants, until a party of horsemen appeared upon the scene.

Then the Carthusian wheeled his steed rapidly round and urged it to a precipitate gallop: and his five companions rushed back to the place where their sixth comrade had remained in charge of the horses. A few moments more—and they all fled in the same direction taken by the monk.

The party whose appearance had proved so opportune in respect to Sir Ernest de Colmar, consisted of fifteen horsemen all well armed and in attendance upon their chief, who appeared to be a fine man of middle age, and with a benevolent expression of countenance; for at this moment the moon, bursting from behind a cloud, shed a stronger lustre than it had hitherto given forth on this night of many and memorable incidents.

The chief of the party, imagining that Sir Ernest had been attacked by banditti, congratulated him on his escape from their predatory and murderous hands; and the Knight thought it as well not to explain away the impression thus received respecting the individuals who had just fled so precipitately from the spot.

'The villains, I perceive,' he added, have led away with them the horse which I bestrode; and——

, In which direction are you journeying?' demanded the chief of the party.

'The sooner I reach Prague,' responded the Knight, the better will it please me.'

'We also are journeying thither,' observed the chief: 'and meseems that in an hour or so our horses' hoofs should ring upon the pavement of that city. 'Tis already considerably past midnight—and my followers as well as myself are wearied with a long day's ride. But we have a spare steed at your service, worthy traveller—and you will perhaps do well, after your recent experience of the perils of the road, to accept our escort to Prague.'

'For these proposals I profier my best thanks,' said the Knight. 'And that you may know whom you have thus laid under an obligation which he will cheerfully redeem on the first opportunity, I take leave to announce myself as Sir Ernest de Colmar, a humble but faithful vassal of his Sovereign Highness the Duke of Ausiria.

'With equal frankness,' responded the chieftain thus courteously addressed,—'and in the hope, Sir Knight, that we shall become better acquainted, do I introduce myself as the Count of Rosenberg.'

'Ah! I have heard enough of your lordship to render me proud and happy thus to form your acquaintance,' said the Knight: then, having mounted the horse which was placed at his disposal, and riding by the nobleman's side as the calvalcade was again put in motion, he observed. 'A few days ago accident led me for a few minutes to the cottage of one of your lordship's forest-keepers—a certain Wildon—and he

spoke of you in such terms that wou'd make any right-minded person desirous to enjoy your lordship's friendship.'

'The forest-keeper of whom your Excellency speaks is one of the most devoted and faithful of my vassals,' observed the the Count of Rosenberg. 'But, come—let us put spurs to our steeds—or we shall not reach Prague within the hour.'

As he thus spoke, the nobleman urged his horse into a smart trot—an example which was immediately followed by Sir Ernest de Colmar and the Count's numerous retainers.

We must avail ourselves of this opportunity to observe that certain remarks which had just now fallen from Lord de Rosenberg's lips, had made the Knight acquainted with the fact that he was scarcely an hour's ride from Prague. This intelligence confirmed the suspicion already entertained by de Colmar that the monk had led him a circuitous route in the morning when conducting him blindfolded to the dwelling-place of the Princess Elizabetha.

In a little more than twenty minutes, the stately towers of Hamelen Castle stood forth from the obscurity of the night; and very shortly afterwards the gleaming walls of the White Mansion appeared in strong relief against the deep and colorless sky.

'I must assuredly pay my respects to that excellent Baroness and form her friendship,' thought the Knight to himself: but even while silently breathing this resolve, he was influenced by certain vague and undefined feelings of curiosity—almost bordering upon suspicions—for which he could scarcely account.

In another half-hour the cavalcade entered the Bohemian capital; and de Colmar discovered, to his delight, that not only had Count de Rosenberg undertaken this journey for the purpose of being present at the council of nobles so soon to assemble—but that he likewise intended to fix his quarters at the Golden Falcon. The fifty men who accompanied him formed the contingent which he brought to aid the garrison in defence of the city; and they were accordingly assigned to the barracks in the Castle, while their noble master availed himself of the good accommodation which the establishment of worthy Messer Templin afforded.

Our readers will scarcely require to be informed that Lionel and Konrad were overjoyed when their beloved master, Sir Ernest de Colmar, returned to his lodgings at the inn; for the two youths, alarmed at an absence of so many hours and for which he had in no way prepared them, sate up until he made his appearance bewtween two and three o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEETING WITH GLORIA.

It was on the 1st of August, and within a few minutes of noon, that Sir Ernest de Colmar ascended the steps leading to the southern rampart of the city of Prague.

He was elegantly dressed—and there was something grandly noble in his demeanor: he seemed the very personification of a generous chivalry—and on his countenance of such perfect manly beauty was depicted that benevolence which had more than once induced the poor and the oppressed stranger to appeal to him to exercise his charity or to see wrongs righted.

But on gaining the rampart, the Knight suddenly stopped short, as an idea struck him—and the smile which his lips wore, as instantaneously departed.

What was he about to do?—and had he well considered the step which he was taking?

In a moment of the heart's venial weakness—under the influence of the soul's pardonable tenderness, when dazzled by a beauty such as mortal eyes never gazed upon before—he had accepted an appointment with a young creature of whom he knew nothing, and whom a singular mystery appeared to envelope. Nay, more—when yielding to similar feelings, he had assented to *another* meeting—also with a being of supernal loveliness, and around whom a deeper veil of mystery was thrown. In a word, he was to encounter Gloria at noon—and Satanais at night,—the golden-haired beauty at the congenial hour of her own sunny splendor—and the dark houri at the suitable season of glowing moonlight!

But was he acting prudently, or even honorably, to think of keeping these appointments each of which was made at a moment when, intoxicated with ineffable feelings, he was not the master of his own actions? At all events, if he intended to meet Gloria, it would be wrong to meet Satanais afterwards: and if his heart or his fancy dictated a preference for Satanais, then ought he to quit the rampart at once and not wait for Gloria.

Preference, indeed!—impossible was it to decide which of the two beauties had the greater claims upon the admiration of the eye and affection of the heart. The brilliant glory of the one might intoxicate the brain and ravish the senses: but the

dark splendor of the other could fill the soul with ineffable emotions and bathe it in a fount of bliss. Dazzled, bewildered, and enchanted by the charms of Gloria, the beholder might sink on his knees in adoration and in worship of that celestial blaze of loveliness: but trembling with profound feelings, melting with tenderness, and filling the air with passionate sighs, the admirer of Satanais would himself sell his soul to Satan in order to gain the privilege of enjoying her love and languishing away existence in her arms.

To decide between Gloria and Satanais was therefore impossible; to choose betwixt the appointment that was for noon and the one that was for nine in the evening, was beyond the power of mortal man.

And, without losing sight of prudential views and honoroble notions, would it not be discourteous in the extreme for Sir Ernest de Colmar to reject either appointment—to absent himself from either place of meeting? Should he not, as a Knight and a gentlemen, proffer his inquiries concerning the health, the welfare, and the happiness of that sunny, golden-haired creature whom he had rescued from such dire peril in the church, and with whom circumstances had so suddenly and unexpectedly placed him on a footing of intimacy all within the compass of a single hour? Besides, had she not asked him with her own sweet voice, when they were about to separate on that memorable night, whether he wished to see her again?—had he not replied in the affirmative, and with some degree of enthusiasm too?—was not, then, the appointment which she made upon the occasion exacted and extorted as it were from her lips!—and, under all these circumstances, could Sir Ernest de Colmar refrain from keeping it?

Decidedly not! Then, in respect to that other appointment—the meeting which was fixed with the dark-complexioned houri for nine in the evening—was he not bound to keep *this* also? Had not Satanais received him with hospitality and pressed him to remain at the encampment?—had he not of his own accord besought her to give him her friendship, when she was comporting herself towards him with the maidenly reserve of an ordinary courtesy? and had he not induced her to name the appointment for the evening by demanding of her in a mournful tone when they were to meet again? Would it, then, be consistent with the behaviour of a Knight and a gentleman to treat that appointment with contempt:—would it not be a gross and flagrant insult towards the beauteous and unoffending young lady to absent himself from the trysting-place she had named.

Yes: and De Colmar, having thus reflected upon the two points in all their bearings, came to the conclusion that he was in duty bound to remain on the rampart for the coming of Gloria, and to repair to the palace-gardens in the evening to exchange a word with Satanais.

We have already stated that Sir Ernest de Colmar had never loved—at least not until he beheld Satanais and Gloria: and whether he now loved either or both of them, he knew not. Assuredly his heart must have been touched by their charms—or he would not have labored so hard to convince himself of the necessity of keeping the double appointment which had been made: for we will at once and most emphatically assure our readers that the soul of this honorable, generous-hearted, and noble-minded man was incapable of harboring, even for a single instant, an idea of seduction. Not for worlds would he have wantonly injured one golden gossamer flowing from the head of Gloria—nor one single ebon thread belonging to that of Satanais!

It was, therefore, at least an innocent sentiment—even if not a serious one—which prompted him to resolve upon keeping the two appointments;—and moreover, we may as well observe in this place that Sir Ernest de Colmar was still unmarried, though in his twenty-seventh year, because he had never as yet beheld a lady whose united charms, virtues, and accomplishments had obtained a sufficient hold upon his heart. But he was a man who would prefer to wed a peasant girl if she was calculated to ensure his happiness, rather than a princess if he felt convinced that he could not love her.

To return, however, to the immediate thread of our narrative.

It was noon;—high noon by the sun—noon by the dial in the market-place—noon by the changing of the guard at the city-gate.

Along the rampart Sir Ernest de Colmar pursued his way; and in a few moments he beheld an elegantly-dressed lady, closely veiled, advancing towards him.

He could not see her countenance—not a glimpse could he obtain of her features—so thick were the folds of that veil: but by the measured step of musical grace—by the elegance and dignity, subdued by feminine softness, that blended in her demeanor—by the goddess-like height and statuesque carriage of her form—and by his heart's own instinctive whisperings, did Sir Ernest de Colmar know that this was Gloria who was now approaching!

Nor was he mistaken: for, when within a few yards of each other, the lady threw

back the veil—revealing the bright and sunny lovelinesss of that heavenly creature with so appropriate a name. Over her shoulders—over her bosom—down below her waist, fell the rich, shining, golden tresses: dark as night—black as velvet—and brilliant as the concentration of ten thousand diamonds, were the magnificent eyes which gave so wild and yet so angelic, so romantic and yet so divine an expression to that countenance. On her cheeks the purest carnation died away imperceptibly until it mingled with the fairest and softest lily; and the dazzling clearness and brilliancy of the complexion appeared as if the vermeil bloom of the peach had been transferred to the surface of the finest damask. The richest scarlet lent its hue to her lips, which were moist, wholesome, and healthy to the sight—worthy portals for the pure and fragrant breath! Spotless, stainless as snow, but of that less gleaming whiteness which belongs to pearls, were the two rows of teeth so perfect in number and faultless in position; and ravishing was the smile which, like Cupid nestling amongst roses, played upon the lips and thus afforded a glimpse of those brilliant teeth.

There is a beauty which kindles the fires of imagination to such an extent that when we waken at last from the illimitable play of a fervent fancy, and when we look again at the countenance which thus inspired us, we find that the real charms were enhanced so far into the ideal by our romantic dream that this second contemplation finds them comparatively insipid and powerless:—but when De Colmar awoke from the bewilderment into which the blaze of Gloria's loveliness plunged his brain—when, after believing for a few moments that he stood in the presence of an angel, he raised his eyes again in the conviction that it was indeed a daughter of earth—then, instead of beholding her less dazzlingly beautiful—less radiently transcendent in the combination of her charms—he felt, in his wrapt and ecstatic mind, that *she* was something to be worshipped and adored and that *he* was the mere dross of earthly clay which ought to worship and adore!

It was no sensual hallucination which he experienced towards that heavenly creature: the feeling which influenced him was as honorable to him as a man, as it was a glowing tribute to the beauty of herself as a matchless woman;—for assuredly is the admiration of female loveliness a virtue—and the Greeks were right when they made it an object of worship.

For oh! by means of that admiration which the sterner sex should ever pay to the softer sex, is Woman enabled to exercise upon Man that holy influence which refines his manners, softens the hard points of his character, and smooths the asperities of his rugged disposition—so that, by captivating his imagination, securing his affections, and enmeshing him in a silken thraldom for good purposes, she soothes his cares with her irresistible powers of solace—insensibly places him in the way to love the virtues which his selfishness, his ambition, and his avarice would otherwise mar—and attaches him to the serene enjoyment of home!

Oh! blessed—thrice blessed woman! myriads of harps have already been tuned to thine honor: thousands and thousands of bards have hymned thy praise; and every poet has penned odes in eulogy of thee! But were all those efforts multiplied a million times, and then remultiplied again and again until language could afford no words to express the magnitude of the total sum—still would your merits remain under-rated, your excellencies but feebly described, and your natural virtues far from adequately extolled!'

Can our readers now entertain some idea of that profound admiration mingled with ecstatic bliss which inspired the soul of Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he accosted Gloria—took her hand—and gently touched it with his lips?

'Is it possible, dear lady,' he exclaimed at length, 'that we thus meet again—that you have deigned to remember your promise—that you are here on the very day and punctual to the hour appointed?'

'Sir Knight, you declared that you wished to see me again,' answered Gloria, casting down her superb eyes—'and I gave the promise which your Excellency half exacted, and which I considered myself bound to keep.'

'Yes, I am aware that I exacted such a promise, Gloria,' he said, his countenance suddenly assuming an expression of mournful pensiveness, as her musical voice fell softly and bewitchingly upon his ear: 'and for one reason I more than half repent my rashness—madness——'

'You now speak bitterly, Sir Knight,' interrupting the heavenly creature, in a tone of such gentle, tender, winning interest, that De Colmar could not help bending upon her a look in which positive affection was expressed. 'Wherefore do you regret the words which led to our present meeting?—Is it that the temporary friendship which you experienced for me at the moment, and which was doubtless as fleeting and transitory as the startling circumstances that excited it——'

'No—no—you are wrong, Gloria,' exclaimed De Colmar, taking her hand and pressing it in his own: then instantly

dropping it—for it was not withdrawn by the lady herself, though a deep blush suffused her cheeks at the action—he said in an earnest tone, 'I am sorry that I have seen you a second time, Gloria, because this interview will make me wish to enjoy the pleasure of another—and heaven only knows whether it will end for the happiness of yourself and me!'

'Do you wish to leave me, Sir Knight, at once—immediately?' answered Gloria, in a low tone which was expressive of deeply concentrated emotions.

'My God! no—no!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'We have not been five minutes together—and you talk of leaving me.'

'Because methought your Excellency repented that we had met,' answered Gloria, turning upon him those magnificent eyes which were capable of kindling in the soul the same fervent and impassioned fires with which they burnt.

'I repented and yet I was glad—I still repent and yet I am steeped as it were in happiness,' said De Colmar. 'Oh! you must be something more than woman—something of the nature of an angel—thus to exercise so powerful an influence and such an irresistible spell over the hearts of those who gaze upon you.'

'Know you not that I am the Daughter of Glory?' she exclaimed, with an air and a tone of archness so strangely commingled with mystery that the Knight was once more bewildered and his senses were enthralled for a few moments.

He gazed upon her—gazed in adoration as she reminded him that she was the Daughter of Glory—and whether it were that a more powerful sunlight was shed upon her hair and was reflected in her eyes at the instant—or whether it were that the Knight's ardent fancy was kindled to a pitch of beatific exaltation—we cannot say: certain however it was that as her lids pronounced those words, her countenance suddenly seemed to shine with a preternatural radiance—and De Colmar felt as if he were indeed looking upon an angel.

The idolatry—the worship—the admiration which filled his brain, merged into a delirium—his heart palpitated violently—his head swam—wild and thrilling hopes sprang up in his breast—his vision became obscured—he staggered back towards the parapet of the rampart—then he passed his hand before his eyes—he gazed again—and Gloria was gone!'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEETING WITH SATANAIS.

'Twas evening—beautiful evening; and the purest, brightest flood of argentine splendour filled the air. The tall towers of Prague shone as if sheathed in silver; and each pinnacle glistened as if tipped with a star.

In the deep clear blue of the over-arching sky sate the virgin goddess of the night on her alabaster throne; and the cold chaste glory of her crystal crown was reflected in the calm bosom of the river Moldau, on whose banks the Bohemian capital is built.

Amidst the silence, and softness, and freshness of this moon lit scene, Sir Ernest de Colmar entered the spacious gardens attached to the palace which no longer harbored a Sovereign. The massive towers of a light grey hue—the long, arched, narrow windows shining like polished mirrors—the noble ascent of white marble steps leading to the principal entrance—and the numerous exquisite specimens of sculpture scattered upon the terrace of the palatial edifice, contrasted with the deep green of the foliage and with those sombre shades which are inseparable from even a glowing night.

But all was still! No strains of delicious music floated from the casements of that splendid structure—no brilliant crowds moved in the mazy dance within those regal halls—no floods of roseate light gushed forth from the lofty portals. Nor did the gardens gleam with refulgent illuminations to provoke the jealousy and disturb the calm dignity of the silver moon—nor did countless forms of sylph-like grace yield with gay gallants to the soft blandishments of love in the acacia bowers, or trip lightly and glancingly along the parterres of roses.

Gone was the blaze of tinsel pageantry attendant upon the royal state: the pomp—the luxury—the ostentation—the magnificence of monarchy had vanished as if their very existence were a dream! Darkness was within the gilded saloons—silence reigned in the gardens and the groves—and the breath of no King weighed like lead upon the elastic atmosphere.

Sir Ernest de Colmar sighed as he stood for a few moments to survey the desert palace: and yet to his soul rushed the conviction that it would have been better for the human race had mankind obeyed the solemn warning which the Almighty conveyed by the lips of the Prophet Samuel against the raising up of Kings!

But suddenly a hand was laid lightly upon his shoulder—and starting from a mournful reverie to the consciousness of a pleasure ineffably sweet, he turned and beheld the beautiful Satanais.

Not a word of greeting, however, could

he utter for nearly a minute: not a syllable expressive of courtesy or joy could he induce his lips to frame. His senses appeared suddenly wrapt in an elysian bliss, the full delight of which could only be appreciated in the midst of profound silence: an ineffable tenderness steeped his very soul in the soft and melting transports of a prolonged ecstacy. His heart was bathed in a fount of ambrosial sweets: he was intoxicated as if with that nectar of the gods which produced the effect of generous wine yet left the memory unimpaired and the imagination free.

And no wonder that he should thus have experienced a bliss which rendered his bosom too full for the lips to give utterance in the language of earth to feelings which appeared the emotions of heaven.

For if Satanais had seemed lovely to his eyes when he beheld her at the Taborite encampment, she now burst upon him in the dark splendor of a beauty incredible even to think of. Throwing off a large black veil which had covered her head and all the upper part of her person, she suddenly stood before him like the genius of an oriental tale—or like the embodiment of a wild and romantic allegory personifying the moonlight and the shades of evening, singularly blended!

No longer attired in the strange garb which she wore at the encampment, the houri was clad in garments more fully becoming her sex, and which set off to a new advantage her tall, symmetrical, and well-developed figure. For her dress was of purple velvet, the plaits and folds of which produced effects where the richest gloss alternated with the deepest, darkest shades; and thus the skirt of the queenly robe had an air of massive splendor as it flowed upon the ground—completely concealing the limbs which the former attire of Satanais had exposed in all their robust but exquisite proportions.

The outlines of the stomacher were marked with pearls; pearls also displayed the upper edge of the boddice; and as it took its shape from the luxurious bust which it only half imprisoned, these rows of pearls, thrown out with dazzling effect by the dark velvet, traced the inflections and described the undulations of the rounded contours. Thus all the fine traits of that striking and brilliant figure—all the sculptural richness of the grandly rising bosom and splendidly modelled shoulders—and all the harmony of the proportions, with their voluptuous swell or their soft relief, were set off and delineated to the utmost advantage.

The sleeves of the purple velvet dress were loose and hanging, and fringed with silver: they descended to the elbow, thus leaving bare the lower part of the arm so round, and plump, and polished, with diamond bracelets upon the wrists, and rings set with kindred stones upon the taper fingers.

Her hair—that glossy hair of raven darkness and silken richness—fell in heavy tresses upon her shoulders and in undulating masses down her back; and it glistened with gems as if a shower of frozen tears had fallen upon the head of this superb creature!

And her countenance!—Oh! lovely as she had seemed when De Colmar first beheld her reclining upon the green sward in front of Zitzka's pavilion—lovely as he thought her when in the wood, on the following morning, she had made the appointment that was kept so faithfully now—ten thousand times more lovely did she appear to him then! For what language can supply words to depict the beauty of those features which would have seemed so softly harmonious and tenderly melting had not the transcendent brilliancy of the eyes shed upon them a halo of living lustre and imparted to them an expression of grandeur and magnificence.

The transparent purity, the fine clearness, and the healthy animation of her dark olive skin gave an air of impassioned fervor to her character, which the hue of the lips, more lively in their scarlet than moistened coral, enhanced into the intensity of desire: but these effects were subdued and all grossness of feeling was mitigated by the finely intellectual cast of the whole countenance and by the genius which sat enthroned so grandly on the noble brow.

Such was the creature of wondrous beauty in whose presence De Colmar again found himself. Forgotten was the lady whom he had met in the morning—the divine Gloria whose loveliness had seemed to ravish his heart in a moment: yet—forgotten was she as completely as if there were not such a being in existence—Satanais alone filled his memory, his mind, his thoughts—and he had eyes, and ears, and sensations only for this darkly splendid being whose charms were calculated to steal away insidiously, though not the less surely, the heart which the other overwhelmed so abruptly with a blaze of glory.

And thus was it, then, amidst the silence and softness, and freshness of the moon-lit scene, that Sir Ernest de Colmar encountered the Daughter of Satan!

'Your Excellency wished to see me again,' said the lady, at length breaking the spell of silence; 'and I am here—true to the promise which I made you.'

'You are here—and I thank you!' exclaimed De Colmar, starting from his bliss-

ful reverie as that voice, so melodious in its golden richness, fell upon his ear, touching a chord that vibrated to his very heart.

'When your Excellency was about to quit the Taborite encampment ten or twelve days ago,' resumed Satanais, hastily, 'you asked me for my friendship—and I granted it. Has your Excellency forgotten that incident?' she demanded, fixing her glorious eyes upon him with an air of mingled scrutiny, hope, and apprehension.

'Forgotten it!' ejaculated Sir Ernest de Colmar, taking her hand and retaining it in both his own: 'such an act were at any time and under any circumstances unworthy of a knight and a gentleman,' he added in a fervent tone: 'but towards *you*, charming lady, it were a crime—a foul crime—a deed of infamy! For the greater the merits of a woman, the more binding should be the influence and the more imperious the claims which she has upon true chivalry.'

Thus speaking, the Knight raised to his lips the soft warm hand of Satanais, who abandoned it to him for a few moments and then gently withdrew it.

'Your Excellency, therefore, still demands my friendship?' she said: 'and I am henceforth to look upon you also as a friend?'

'Heaven forbid that it should be otherwise!' exclaimed De Colmar. 'But wherefore these questions, Satanais?'

'Because it were unbecoming in me to remain with your Excellency another minute in this secluded place and at such an hour, unless it were under the sacred guardianship of that chivalrous friendship which a knight may entertain for a lady,—a friendship,' added Satanais in a lower tone, 'which she is permitted to reciprocate.'

'Charming girl—as discreet and prudent as you are lovely!' exclaimed De Colmar; 'the day may come when I shall indeed be enabled to testify my friendship towards you. For you are by some means leagued with a band which, though well-meaning, conscientious, and exemplary, may nevertheless experience vicissitude—and then,' added the Knight proudly, 'humble though I appear, it may yet fall within my means to afford efficient succor to yourself, beauteous lady!'

'My gratitude—my sincerest gratitude is your due, Sir Knight,' said Satanais, her dark eyes speaking her thanks at the same time, but far more eloquently than even her words. 'And yet another question have I to ask you,' she continued, her tone growing suddenly serious. 'Have you well reflected on the subject whereof we have been speaking?—have you well weighed all the considerations which should suggest themselves with regard to the institution of a compact of friendship between you and me?'

'I had not indeed reflected that friendship is a dangerous sentiment,' answered De Colmar, suddenly struck by the idea which the lady's remark could not fail to engender. 'Listen to me, Satanais—listen to me with attention—while I speak frankly and candidly to you.'

'I am listening,' said the Daughter of Satan, in a low and tremulous tone which evinced internal agitation. 'Come,' she exclaimed hastily, 'let us ascend to the terrace of yon deserted palace and walk slowly to and fro while you enter upon the explanations which you are evidently about to give me.

De Colmar took her hand—and it trembled in his own. Vainly, vainly did he endeavor to appear as if he observed not that indication of emotion: vainly did he struggle against the sudden inclination which urged him to bestow on that hand a reassuring pressure. The feeling was irresistable—the impulse was stronger than himself; the spell of a transcendent witchery was upon him, the silent but powerful incantation of the Daughter of Satan's glorious eyes enthralled his entire being. The mere contact of that soft warm hand was thrilling, intoxicating, ecstatic; and, as it still trembled in his own, he pressed it!

Yes—he pressed it; and the pressure was returned gently, but unmistakably; and at the same moment Satanais threw upon him a look so full of feeling, so replete with the most melting tenderness, though conveyed by the lustrous beams of eyes whose ordinary rays were lightnings—that a glow of ineffable bliss was diffused throughout his entire frame, and his heart appeared plunged into an atmosphere of beatific raptures.

They gained the terrace—and hand in hand they walked slowly along that marble platform adorned with statues which shone with a spectral whiteness in the pure lustre of the moon.

'You were telling me, Sir Knight,' said Satanais, 'that when you besought me to accord you my friendship, you remembered not that it was a dangerous sentiment.'

And she uttered the concluding words of the sentence, her voice grew tremulous and low, like music dying off at a distance.

'The observation which you have repeated,' answered De Colmar, 'did indeed fall from my lips: and I must frankly confess that in one sense it may not admit of a very courteous interpretation. But I take heaven to witness, Satanais, that I did not mean to offend you—much less to wound your feelings! No, no—I would sooner perish before your eyes in the blood of a suicide than give *you* pain. For I was about to explain to you that dazzled by your transcendent beauty—overpowered by

the more than earthly influence of your charms—yielding to the impulse of emotions never known or felt till then, I besought your friendship——'

'And you now repent the rashness of your demand?' exclaimed Satanais, suddenly withdrawing her hand.

'This is cruel—unkind—most undeserved!' ejaculated De Colmar, turning towards her and looking with mingled tenderness and reproach into her deep unfathomable eyes. 'For, as heaven can attest,' he continued in a tone of increasing fervor, 'I was about to declare that although I besought your friendship in a moment of enthusiasm and without an instant's reflection—yet that never can I regard it otherwise than as a boon of which any knight in Christendom should be proud.'

Satanais gave him her hand—but spoke no word; and for a few minutes they walked on in silence together.

'Yes,' resumed De Colmar, at length,—'the more I now contemplate this friendship which we have vowed to each other, the greater is my delight. For although it may happen that the party whose side circumstances compel me to espouse may proclaim war—yes, open war against the sect with which you are associated, nevertheless shall we be friends, Satanais—and even while in hostility with your Taborite people, shall I be enabled to watch over your safety But these are not the only considerations which make me rejoice at the compact which we have formed. For, as a true knight, am I bound by that compact to serve you in any way and by all means consistent with mine honor: and the day and the hour may haply come when you will have need of my arm. Then, Satanais—dear Satanais, thou wilt find it it is no coward champion to whom thou hast entrusted thy cause, whatever it may be! For I swear, by yon moon which treads so lovely and brightly in its deep blue path on high, that should there be at any time found a man capable of even threatening thee with insult,—and shou'd the circumstance reach mine ears,—never will I rest until I have avenged thee! Dost thou hear me, Satanais?'

'I hear thee—oh! I hear thee—my brave and generous friend,' she exclaimed, in a tone that evinced an effusion of the heart's most joyous feelings: and I thank thee from the bottom of my soul! Poor however is the return which I can make thee: for all I can proffer—all I can promise, is the love of a sister. And should you, therefore, ever be stretched on the bed of sickness, God send that I may be near to minister to you—to sustain your aching head—to place the cooling cup to your lips—and breathe words of solace and hope in your ear.'

'Excellent Satanais!' cried de Colmar, profoundly moved by all that the lady had just said: 'how amiable is your disposition—how good is your heart! My God! by what terrible inconsistency could'st thou have acquired the name of the *Daughter of Satan?*'

'Oh! 'tis a dread history—a narrative full of affright and horror—a legend replete with a wild and appalling interest!' exclaimed Satanais, pressing the Knight's hand convulsively and throwing agitated looks around as if she feared lest spectres should start from the sombre shade produced by the buttresses of the building, or that the white statues should spring into a hideous and ghastly life.

'Pardon me for having made so indiscreet an observation,' said De Colmar. 'I meant it not with a view to elicit any particular explanation from your lips, sweet lady: it was a mere passing remark, uttered on the impulse of the moment——'

'Cease this exculpatory tone, interrupted Satanais, bending on the Knight a look of kindness and tender confidence: 'are we not friends?—and should secrets exist between us? No—no,' she exclaimed, her harmonious voice swelling into a tone of enthusiasm: 'I will not return with mistrust and diffidence all the generous assurances which you have ere now given me! Besides,' she added, as if a sudden idea had struck her,—'it may be in your power to aid me with your advice—your counsel? Yes—I will reveal to you,' she added more reflectively, 'that wild and wondrous narrative: I will breathe to the ears of friendship the legend of mystery and horror!'

But scarcely had she uttered these words, when a loud voice—coming apparently from the depths of the very earth—exclaimed in deep sonorous tones, 'Daughter of Satan, thine hour approacheth?'

'Avaunt, Demon!' shrieked the affrighted girl in a tone and, staggering forward, she would have fallen headlong from the marble terrace, had not Sir Ernest de Colmar caught her in his arms.

A loud fiendish laugh, as if a maniac were expressing a diabolical joy, rang, through the air: and so strong was the convulsive spasm which shook the form of Satanais with an indescribable dread, that the Knight was compelled to wind his arms completely around her and even press her to his bosom in order to prevent her from falling heavily on the hard pavement.

Then a long moan succeeded to the thrilling, piercing cry which mingled an-

guish and horror had torn from her very heart—and, closing those lustrous eyes which for a moment had gleamed and and shone with a terrific wildness she remained still, motionless, and as one dead in the embrace of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

Shaking off by a powerful effort the sudden feeling of superstitious awe which had seized upon himself, and murmuring a few words of prayer to his patron saint, the Knight rapidly descended from the marble terrace, and bore his charming burthen to a seat in an arbour where the honeysuckle and clematis entertwining hung in graceful festoons. Then she opened her eyes again—and wildly her hasty looks were cast around, as if dreading to encounter some hideous spectre or some object of appalling terror.

But when her gaze met that of Sir Ernest de Colmar, her countenance—as the pure moonlight shone fully upon it through the entrance of the arbour immediately softened into an expression of unimaginable tenderness, confidence, and gratitude; and slowly raising herself to a sitting posture from the half-embrace in which he retained her, she murmured, 'A thousand thanks for your kindness towards me! It was terrible—Oh! it was terrible—that interruption—and the shock which it gave me——'

'But tell me, Satanais—tell me,' exclaimed the Knight, hastily seizing her hand and fixing his eyes upon her countenance,—'what meant those awful words which the mysterious voice proclaimed?'

'I dare not enter upon explanations now,' replied the lady, flinging hurried and affrighted glances around. 'On another occasion—at an early opportunity——'

'Nevertheless, you must not leave me in this suspense,' interrupted Sir Ernest. 'I am not superstitiously inclined—and I would sooner attribute to human agency than to a preternatural source the incident which has just occurred. But that voice was so omnious—the words it uttered were of such terrible significancy—and the effects produced upon you, beauteous lady, were so startling——'

'Oh! force me not into explanations at present!' exclaimed Satanais, apparently writhing beneath the influence of appalling reminiscences. 'I cannot collect my thoughts sufficiently nor command courage enough to tell the dread tale which alone can account for the voice that you have heard, the warning it gave, and the effect it produced, Oh! spare me now, my dear friend,' she cried, clasping her hands and extending them in an appealing manner towards him: 'urge me not to commence a narrative that must awaken memories more poignant and arouse horrors more frightful than those which have already made me their victim!'

'But shall we soon meet again, Satanais?' demanded the Knight, profoundly touched by her manner and entertaining for her an immense sympathy, despite of one awful misgiving which, energetically as he struggled to crush it, still rose uppermost in his mind.

'We will meet soon again—very soon,' replied the dark-complexioned houri: and although her raven hair shone as with a glory in the pure moonlight and her eyes were as bright as if each were animated with the condensed lustre of the sun, yet was there something about her so soft and melting and her beauty now became so gentle and winning that an indescribable tenderness stole over De Colmar, and he felt his cheek mantle and his heart throb with the strange spell of a passion to him so new!

'You say that we shall meet again,' he observed, in a low and tremulous tone: 'but when will it be?'

'I cannot fix a day nor an hour,' responded the charming creature, modulating her voice to that subdued and mournful tenderness which filled his own: 'but you may rest assured,' she added, with some degree of bashfulness and hesitation, 'that I will seek an early opportunity to make you acquainted with the strange history of my birth. Farewell, Sir Knight, for the present—farewell.

'Nay—one moment!' ejaculated Sir Ernest de Colmar, springing from the seat and seizing her hand as she was about to fly from the arbor: 'tell me lady,—tell me, dear lady, what meant those terrible words which still ring in my ears? For, Oh! I cannot believe, even for an instant, that the Enemy of Mankind has acquired a right or a claim with regard to yourself——'

'Holy God! am I not the Daughter of Satan?' she exclaimed, an expression of awful wildness and unutterable horror sweeping over her countenance, while her eyes suddenly appeared to dart forth living lightnings.

'But this is terrible—terrible?' cried De Colmar, flinging himself back upon the seat of the arbor, and covering his face with both his hands: for it now indeed seemed evident there was a deeper and a more awful meaning in the name of Satanais than he had hitherto supposed.

For nearly a minute did he remain wrapped in a most painful reverie; then, suddenly becoming aware that the silence of utter solitude prevailed upon him, he raised his eyes and found that he was alone;

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO PAGES.

In the meantime—while the preceding interview was taking place between Sir Ernest de Colmar and the beautiful but mysterious Satanais—the Knight's two pages, Lionel and Konrad, had sallied forth together to enjoy the lovelinsss of the evening and contemplate the silent features of the Bohemian capital in the pure moonlight.

The youths, having walked completely around the ramparts, reached the immediate vicinity of the southern gate and were already thinking of returning to the hostel, when they were suddenly encountered by an old woman of respectable appearance and whose features wore a prepossessing air of cheerfulness and good humor.

'Tis a pleasant evening, fair youths,' she exclaimed, thus familiarly accosting the youths, after having surveyed them both with some attention.

'Yes—the weather is charming, worthy dame,' responded Lionel in a courteous tone; 'and your fine city appears even more lovely by mooonlight than when bathed in the golden lustre of day.'

'Ye are strangers, then, in Prague, handsome youths?' observed the old woman, inquiringly.

'Not altogether,' answered Konrad—seeing that we have already been here several days.'

'And do you purpose to tarry here much longer?' asked the dame, who seemed both inquisitive and garrulous.

'We are not our own masters,' replied Lionel: 'but it is not probable that our residence in Prague will be prolonged many weeks. All depends upon the duration of the businesss which is to occupy the nobles who assemble to-morrow.'

'Ah!' ejaculated the old woman: 'then am I to understand that you are both attached to the person of one of those high and mighty chiefs who within the last few days have arrived in Prague?'

'Your conjecture is accurate, good dame,' said Lionel. 'But we must now return to our quarters. Come, Konrad—it is growing late.'

'Late!' exclaimed the old woman, in a tone of such mingled irony and contempt that the youths, who were already walking away, turned round and contemplated her with astonishment. 'Late!' she repeated in a manner that tended still farther to rivet their attention and excite their curiosity: 'is it possible that ye serve so harsh and severe a master that he compels you to seek your chambers at the very hour when music breathes its melting strains in the abode of luxury, and when the bright eyes of beauty look brighter still in the blaze of crystal chandeliers?' Oh! fie—to think of stretching your indolent limbs on the couch of slumber when the voluptuous dance courts the presence of your graceful forms and the fair hand of lovely woman is ready to hold the wine cup to your lips!'

'She raves! Let us depart,' whispered Konrad, endeavoring to lead his companion away.

'No—not yet,' returned the latter, in the same subdued tone: 'for if this be madness, there is method in it, Konrad—and I am much deceived if some pleasant adventure is not developing itself for our enjoyment.'

'You imagine that I am either speaking in jest, or uttering meaningless things, fair youths,' said the old woman, who had not failed to perceive the desire of the one to depart and the other to remain: 'but I am neither prone to unreasonable jocularity nor to waste my time in folly. I am going straightway hence to a perfect paradise upon earth—where brilliantly lighted halls are crowded with the gallant and the handsome, the beautiful and the fascinating—where music pours forth its sweetest strains and the softest voices unite in tender airs—where tables groan beneath the luxuries which all the corners of the world furnish as a banquet—and where pleasure wafts the soul away from its sense of mortal restraint and bears it to a realm of elysian bliss. Such is the destination whither I am now bound: but must I go alone?'

'By heavens! no, good dame—provided I may accompany thee!' exclaimed Lionel, enraptured at the glowing description which the old woman gave of her earthly paradise; and, without waiting for her reply, he turned to his companion, saying, 'Did I not assure thee Konrad, that this was an adventure which we must not hesitate to embrace?'

'Indeed, fair youths,' hastily observed the dame—'ye are right well welcome to accompany me, and I can promise that your reception will prove of the most flattering description.'

I perceive but one difficulty,' said Konrad, now yielding, though somewhat more tardily than Lionel, to the temptation which the old woman presented in such dazzling colors to their veiw.

'And that difficulty I can anticipate,' replied Lionel, speaking aside and in an under tone. 'You are afraid that our excellent and kind-hearted master will chide us to-morrow for returning home late to-night? But on this head there is naught to apprehend: for ere he went out just now he intimated to me that he dispensed with our

services for the remainder of the evening.'

'In this case I hesitate no longer,' exclaimed Konrad aloud: then addressing himself to the old woman, he said, 'We are prepared to avail ourselves, good dame, of the invitation which you have given us to this unknown paradise of whose portals you seem to possess the key: but I pray you to grant us a few minutes' license that we may return to the hostel at which we are staying in order to make such change in our apparel as will benefit us for the courtly company to whom you so kindly purpose to introduce us.'

'It is not necessary, fair youth,' said the old woman. 'At the noble mansion whither I am about to lead you, there is a toilette-chamber which will furnish you with raiment well becoming your graceful forms and handsome countenances. Come, then—delay not—for we have a journey to perform ere we reach the entrance of that terrestrial paradise of which I am but the humble porteress.'

'A journey! exclaimed both of the youths, with a simultaneous expression of astonishment. 'We thought that this scene of pleasure and gaiety was close at hand—within the city walls——'

'What does an hour's travelling on horseback alarm you, Sir Page?' cried the old woman in a tone of sovereign contempt. 'Oh! if this be the case, I beseech you to remain where you are, you will indeed do best to decline the invitation which your prepossessing exterior and amiable looks prompted me to give you——'

'And suddenly checking herself as if it were useless to bestow further observations upon the matter, the indignant dame was hurrying off when Lionel caught her by the sleeve of her dress, exclaiming, 'Pardon us, I beseech thee—and disappoint us not, after having so highly raised our curiosity and our hopes.'

'Follow me, then,' said the woman, suffering herself to be appeased: 'but I warn you, fair youths, that unless you implicitly obey all the conditions I shall impose upon you, it will be impossible for me to procure you the honor, the gratification, and the delight which may become yours on such easy terms.

'Lead the way, good dame,' cried Lionel; 'and you shall find us as docile and obedient to your commands as if we were carrying out the behest of our own much-loved master.'

The old woman smiled approvingly—and descending from the rampart, she passed out of the postern-gate, followed by the two pages.

Turning abruptly to the left, as soon as the outworks of the fortifications were cleared, they proceeded at a rapid rate for nearly a mile, and then entered a grove intersected by a narrow winding path. The old woman walked with singular agility considering her years; and in a short time they reached a cemetry the marble monuments of which gleamed white and ghastly in the brilliant lustre of the spotless moon. Threading this burial-ground, the dame led the way towards a small chapel, in the rear of which a man was holding three horses.

Two of the animals were saddled in the usual style: the third had a pillion for the accommodation of the female. But before she either mounted her own steed or invited the youths to bestride the others, the man who had held them, and who was dressed in the menial garb of a hostler, fetched from the interior of the chapel, two ecclesiastical gowns; and presenting one to Lionel and the other to Konrad, he bade them envelop themselves therein.

Though for an instant startled by this request, neither of the youths chose to be the first to offer an objection: a spirit of pride would not permit one to evince any apprehension in the presence of the other—and thus they both complied with the singular demand. But something more was now to be exacted from them: for scarcely had they assumed the gowns which hung so loosely and disfiguringly about their slim and graceful forms, when the old woman, addressing them in a wheedling, coaxing tone, said, 'The path to that paradise whither I am about to conduct you, must be shrouded in mystery and veiled in secrecy. You have pledged yourselves to be docile and obedient to any conditions which I may impose; it is now, then, that I demand the fulfilment of your solemn promise.'

'What do you require of us, good dame?' asked Konrad, almost regretting that he had embraced an adventure which was already characterised by such singular features.

'That you permit me to close the hoods of these gowns over your countenance,' was the response; 'and that you seek not to remove them until we arrive at our journey's end.'

'Be it so!' exclaimed Lionel, hastily. 'This incident already savours of the romantic,' he observed to his companion.

'Heaven grant that it may not terminate more seriously,' said Konrad, in the lowest possible whisper.

Lionel made no reply—but hastened to throw the cowl over his head; and the old woman buttoned it carefully in front. She then performed the same ceremony towards

Konrad; and, this being done, the hostler assisted the youths to mount the animals which were already pawing the ground impatiently. The old woman was next placed by the man's aid upon her pillion, and stationing herself between the two pages, she was enabled to hold the guiding-rein attached to each of their horses.

In this manner the party rode away from the cemetery at a brisk trot.

For nearly a quarter of an hour not a word was spoken: but at the expiration of that time the steeds were reined in to a walk, and the old woman availed herself of the opportunity to utter a few reassuring words to her youthful companions.

'You must not be surprised nor alarmed, young sirs,' she said 'at the mystery which thus shrouds your journey to the place of our destination. The truth is that having once passed a night in the midst of that scene of pleasure, luxury, and enjoyment, you may never again hope to penetrate thither: the same guest thus introduced from the great busy world without, must not cross the threshold of that noble mansion a second time. But so ravishing are the attractions—so irresistible the fascinations of this terrestrial paradise, that he who has once sipped of the cup of pleasure within that sphere of love, and music, and festivity, can never divest himself of the ardent longing that prompts him to return. And inasmuch as I have already told you that such return is forbidden—so is it necessary to veil from the eye of the guest the path which leads to a scene wherein all his sweetest reminiscences will be ever after centred. Now, fair youths,' demanded the old woman, in a lively tone, 'do you comprehend wherefore I am leading you blindfolded to a spot the glories of which surpass the brightest and most enchanting visions that your slumber ever conjured up?'

'Yes—we understand—and we are satisfied,' said Konrad, ashamed of the temporary alarm which he had ere now experienced, and anxious to convince his fellow-page that he no longer entertained any misgiving.

'You have raised my curiosity and my hopes to such a degree,' cried the more enthusiastic and impassioned Lionel, 'that were it necessary to pass through unheard-of perils and encounter incredible dangers, in order to reach the earthly paradise which you have depicted, good dame, I should not hesitate to dare them all.'

'Which sentiment I now cordially echo,' observed Konrad, catching the spirit of adventure and the chivalrous love of enterprise which animated his companion.

'Worthy are ye then, fair youths,' exclaimed the old woman, 'of the pleasures and delights to which ye are hastening.'

While she was yet speaking, the animals broke out into a smart canter; and for three quarters of an hour more the journeys was continued in silence.

At the expiration of that interval the party halted—a massive door swung heavily on its hinges—and the equestrian dame conducted the two youthful companions into a paved court-yard, where they alighted.—The hoods were speedily unbuttoned—the gowns were thrown off—and a mellowed blaze of roseate lustre streamed from innumerable windows upon the eyes of the pages

For a moment they were dazzled and bewildered by the vermeil effulgence which thus shone forth upon them, but a second glance showed them that they were in a court surrounded by a stately marble edifice, the casements of which were of stained glass. Several pages, elegantly dressed, advanced towards them from the threshold of a hall, the vast folding doors of which stood open; and while some received their horses, others conducted the two youths into the mansion. The old woman did not accompany them: but ere they passed from the court, Lionel and Konrad turned their heads and threw upon her a look of gratitude for having brought them to a place the exterior of which seemed to give ample promise that all her representations would be fulfilled within.

The dependants of the mansion conducted the two youths up a marble staircase adorned with immense vases filled with the choicest flowers, and lighted by lamps held in the hands of alabaster statues. All was bright and glowing: the air was laden with perfume;—and sounds of music from distant rooms stole softly and entrancingly upon the ears.

Lionel and Konrad were already intoxicated with the delightful anticipation of all the pleasures hinted at by the old woman; and they ceased to remember the mysterious circumstances under which the night's adventure was begun. The pages escorted them into an elegantly furnished toilette-chamber, whence a bathing-room opened; and pointing to a wardrobe, one of the dependants intimated that it contained an assortment of costumes whence they might select those which they fancied to be the most becoming. The same servitor added that in half-an-hour he would return and conduct the two guests to the saloons where the company would be by that time assembled. The pages then retired—and Lionel and Konrad found themselves alone.

But they had little leisure for hazarding conjectures relative to the adventure the in-

cidents of which appeared to have only just begun. The wardrobe displayed to their admiring eyes such a variety of tasteful, elegant, and rich dresses that they were at a loss to make a selection. Finding, however, that the minutes were slipping rapidly away and that they had none to spare, they hastened to fix their choice; and this important step being taken, they addressed themselves in good earnest to their toilette.

Having first bathed in tepid founts of water perfumed with essence of roses, they assumed the rich and elegant apparel which they had chosen; and assuredly if it had been the old woman's aim to select the two handsomest and most graceful youths in Prague to be introduced as guests to the mansion on the present occasion, she could not have more successfully performed her task.

The half-hour having expired, the pages re-appeared. Lionel and Konrad followed them away from the toilette-chamber—across a magnificent landing at the head of the marble staircase—and thence to an ante-room at the extremity of which two tall porters, in superb liveries, were stationed motionless as statues against a pair of lofty folding-doors which shone like burnished gold.

Almost at the very instant that Lionel and Konrad were ushered into this ante-room, a superb water-clock standing in a niche proclaimed the hour of midnight: then, the moment that it had ceased striking, a silver bell suspended in an illuminated lantern rising above an opening in the ceiling, began to tinkle melodiously; the richly dressed porters rolled back the gilded folding-doors, and the interior of an immense saloon revealed to the dazzled and bewildered youths such a blaze of female loveliness as never burst on mortal eyes before.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FESTIVAL.

Yes—it was indeed a terrestrial paradise which thus broke upon the view of Lionel and Konrad when the shining portals were thrown back at the signal given by the silver bell that tinkled so punctually at midnight. And on the threshold they stood—those two young pages—transfixed with ecstatic wonderment, and spell-bound with an indescribable rapture which would not permit even the eye to wink lest the scene should flit away in a moment.

All was bright, brilliant, and glowing. Innumerable lamps, shaded with globes of purple glass, poured a flood of rose-tinted lustre through the vast saloon; and glistening diamonds seemed to fling forth jets of vivid light from the brow of beauty. The crimson draperies fringed with massive bullion—the vases of polished gold—the fruit dishes of crystal elaborately cut—the costly ornaments of the sumptuous furniture—and the numerous mirrors that multiplied into countless throngs the groups of lovely women and handsome gallants,—all combined to produce an effect at once dazzling to the eye and intoxicating to the sense.

The superb apartment, so gorgeous in all its features, was of surprising magnitude—stretching so far back that when viewed from the threshold of the open portals it seemed like a vast theatre filled with a brilliant assemblage.

But though in that saloon of roseate effulgence and of warm and perfumed atmosphere, there appeared as many elegantly dressed and handsome gentlemen as there were ladies of ravishing beauty,—it was nevertheless this blaze of female loveliness that at first absorbed the interest, the attention, and the feelings of the two youthful pages. Every style of beauty had its representative at this congress of unrivalled charms: every gradation and shade of feminine attractions might here be observed and contemplated with delight;—every taste was certain to experience prompt and complete satisfaction in this assemblage of the most faultless specimens of womankind.

Forms blending the perfection of grace and elegance, as well as those which were softly rounded into luxuriant proportions,—figures sylph-like and delicate, as well as those that were striking and brilliant;—eyes black and melting like those of the gazelle, as well as orbs dark and brilliant as the thunder-cloud pouring forth its lightnings,—or, again, deep blue eyes in which heaven itself appeared to dwell, or in whose looks vivacity and spirit sparkled or where cheerfulness danced rapturously;—hair that rolled in a precious flood of glowing auburn over necks and shoulders of dazzling whiteness, or that fell in sable glossiness upon a skin rich with the olive tint and the vermeil bloom of the brunette,—or tresses of flaxen paleness setting of the complexion which seemed to be of milk and roses; countenances impressed with a beauty that was akin to sublimity, as well as those of cherub loveliness,—faces that were pale with a languor full of ravishing sweetness and softness, as well as those which were animated with an expression of seductive wantonness,—features which shone with love and tenderness, as well as those which were stamped with intellec-

tuality,—such were the varieties of female charms and characteristics that formed the assemblage so grandly brilliant and so ineffably enchanting.

For a few minutes, we say, did Konrad and Lionel behold naught save this earthly galaxy which we have endeavored to describe, but to convey an adequate idea of whose dazzling splendour language is too feeble. At length they somewhat recovered their self-possession—awaking as it were from the intoxicating effect of the suddenness with which the matchless spectacle burst upon their view; and now, standing somewhat back, they proceeded to take a calmer and more comprehensive view of the entire scene.

We have already said enough to convince the reader that the female portion of the company was a perfect concentration of all the fascinating charms, seductive graces, and elegant characteristics which belong to the sex: and we may now observe, as indeed we have above intimated, that the gentlemen were in every way worthy of such sweet companionship. For finer specimens of manly beauty it would have been hopeless to search; while nothing could exceed the richness of their attire, the ease and polish of their manners, and the devotedness of their attentions to the ladies.

The ages of the members of this brilliant assembly were of every variety between sixteen or seventeen to forty; and thus the nanscent charms of the young girl contrasted with the ripe beauties of the splendid woman—and the gracefulness of the beardless stripling threw into relief the physical developement of the man in his vigorous prime.

Some of the ladies were reclining on voluptuous ottomans, conversing with their gallants whose eyes shot forth amorous glances and were met by looks not less intense nor beaming with inferior passion: others were partaking of the refreshments which their attentive admirers handed to them;—and others, again, promenaded slowly with their elegant partners in the festive scene.

At the moment when Lionel and Konrad so far recovered themselves as to be enabled to survey the dazzling spectacle with comparative calmness, a lady of queen-like beauty and a gentleman of noble mien were advancing down the room; and the eyes of the two pages presently settled upon this couple with even attention more profound than they had bestowed upon the rest. For the lady and her companion to whom we are alluding were of an appearance which could not fail to attract especial notice,—so full of a princely dignity was the mien of the latter, and so magnificent was the style of beauty which characterised the former. Moreover, by the smiles which she dispensed upon all sides as she moved slowly through the vast saloon, and by the extreme respect with which her courteous attentions were received, it was evident to Konrad and Lionel that the lady was the presiding genius of the revels—the superb queen of this dazzling assemblage!

She was of mature age—in her fortieth year;—but her natural loveliness was on that grand scale which preserves the freshness of youth even when passing the prime, and to which art may be rendered a gentle accessory though by no means admitted as a necessity. Her figure was full and of luxuriant contour; her broad shoulders, softly rounded, sloped gracefully and were of dazzling whiteness: her bust was of splendid development and of snowy stainlessness;—and her waist, compressed by no unnatural means, was not of wasp-like thinness but of Hebe-like symmetry. Her hair was of a rich brown, arranged in tresses massive and glossy, and setting off her complexion which was dazzlingly fair: but upon her cheeks the mysteries of the toilette's art had shed the tint of a softly blushing rose. She was in all respects a splendid woman—every movement of her fine form having its own peculiar charm, and every glance of her deep blue eye its spell: so that while commanding in her mien, she likewise fascinated and attracted—and while the Grecian outline of her features denoted strength of mind, her looks conveyed an expression of tenderness and love, melting at times into an ineffable voluptuousness.

Her companion was a man of about her own age, or it might be a year or two older: and his countenance, though not remarkably handsome, bore the impress of strong passions. His garb was of rich purple velvet; and suspended to his neck was a gold chain of the peculiar workmanship which in those times indicated the rank of a Marquis. But that he was not the husband of the lady who leant upon his arm, was apparent from the extreme courtesy of his demeanor towards her—the attentions which he evinced being rather those of an impassioned admirer than of one enchained in matrimonial bonds.

There was another person in the saloon who specially attracted the notice of the two pages, and of whom we must pause to say a few words. This was a young lady of ravishing beauty—with blue eyes, brown hair, and a sylph-like figure. She was dressed in crimson velvet; and her stainless neck, which shone fair in the roseate

flood of lustre, was embellished with pearls of extraordinary size. Her countenance wore an expression of a mingled pensiveness and soft langour, as if the luxury of the scene caused a tender and melting sensuousness to steal over her, absorbing previously existing thoughts of a melancholy character. In her hand she carried a large fan made of the variegated plumage of foreign birds; and she was seated on an ottoman next to a fair-haired young lady with whom she was conversing.

Such were the principal features of the brilliant scene that broke, in the manner already described, upon the view of Lionel and Konrad, and which they had leisure to contemplate for a few minutes ere their presence on the threshold of the gilded portals was noticed by any of the inmates of that magnificent saloon.

But now the eyes of the splendid lady whom we have described and who appeared to be the hostess of the mansion, suddenly fell upon the two pages; and, having directed her companion's attention towards them, she beckoned them with a smiling countenance to approach.

Then Lionel and Konrad crossed the threshold of that terrestrial paradise; and with a low obeisance did the graceful youths salute the lady and her noble gallant.

'You are welcome, fair sirs,' she said, in a voice so full of kindness and cordiality that the pages suddenly felt relieved of nearly all the embarrassment which oppressed them: and looking up they beheld the eyes of many fair creatures around fixed upon themselves. 'Yes—you are welcome to the festive halls of my mansion,' continued the lady; 'but ere you plunge headlong into the pleasures and enjoyments of this elysian scene, there is a short though impressive and most necessary ceremony to be performed. Follow me!'

And relinquishing the arm of her companion, who stepped aside, the lady conducted the two youths completely through the vast apartment, so that they were not only enabled to take a nearer and more comprehensive view of the gay company which it contained, but they likewise became the objects of attention and admiration on the part of more than one enchanting creature.

At the farther extremity of the immense saloon, the lady drew aside a velvet curtain behind which she passed, followed by the two pages, who now found themselves in a small ante-room containing a table covered with fruits in crystal dishes, sweetmeat on porcelain plates, and confectionery in golden boxes ornamented with precious stones. There were likewise gold cups filled with spiced wine—silver goblets containing the pure vintage of France—and exquisitely-cut crystal glasses of sherbet in which lumps of ice were floating.

But without pausing to offer the youths any refreshment, the superb hostess traversed this little room, and pushing open the door on the opposite side, still beckoned them to follow her. They obeyed: but scarcely had they set their feet upon the threshold of a small chamber in which a rude iron lamp, suspended to the ceiling, was burning dimly, when a cry of alarm burst from the lips of each, and they recoiled with wildly glaring eyes and features convulsed with ineffable horror.

'If ye are cowards, how came ye within the walls of my mansion?' demanded the lady, her countenance suddenly losing all its sweetness and becoming distorted with rage—while those eyes that had erst looked all the wantonness of love and pleasure, shot forth lightnings.

'No, lady—we are not cowards,' said Lionel, coloring with indignation: 'but we choose to war only against the living——'

'And not with the dead!' ejaculated Konrad, emphatically.

And as they thus spoke, the youths simultaneously flung horrified and shuddering looks into the interior of that dimly-lighted chamber.

'Follow me, I command you!' exclaimed the lady, in so imperious a tone that the pages were overawed; but still they hesitated, as if some tremendous peril were to be dared or some hideous object to be encountered beyond the threshold on which they thus stood transfixed and paralysed with appalling sensations.

The lady cast upon them a look of withering scorn mingled with diabolical menace: nay, more—her features, naturally so grandly handsome, so royally beautiful, were distorted with a species of fiendish defiance, and she seemed to glower upon the youths with eyes of fire.

'Follow me, I command you!' she said again. 'This is the second time that I have spoken: beware how you disobey me when I adjure you thrice. For, as certainly as you are standing there, shall *those things* start forth from their funeral abodes—clasp their arms around you——'

'Oh! this is horrible—horrible!' exclaimed Konrad, covering his countenance with both his hands.

'Courage, my dear friend—courage!' whispered Lionel, hastily but emphatically. 'We have already gone too far to retreat—much farther than we ever ought to have ventured;—and let us not therefore shrink

from even *this*, appalling though it be!'

'No—no—we will not dishonor ourselves,' murmured Konrad, calling all his presence of mind to his aid.

'Follow me! I command you,' spoke the lady a third time, extending her arm imperiously towards the interior of the room.

And with difficulty suppressing renewed ejaculations of horror, the two pages crossed the threshold.

Then the door closed behind them;—and when it opened again and they came forth at the expiration of about five minutes, their countenances were ghastly pale—their lips, from which the color had fled, quivered convulsively—and they trembled so excessively that they could scarcely return into the sheaths the daggers which they held drawn in their hands.

But the lady had regained all her wonted calmness: her features had recovered the soft, sensual, yet dignified expression of beauty which ordinarily characterised it;—and it was in a tone of ineffable sweetness that she invited the youths to partake some refreshment. Then, with her own fair hands, she presented to each a goblet of spiced wine; and the pages drank with avidity the cheering draught whereof they stood so much in need.

Yes, Lionel and Konrad quaffed the contents of those golden goblets; and in a moment they experienced the exhilarating effects of the generous liquor. The color rushed back, with an heightened glow, to their cheeks—a flood of light poured into their swimming eyes—smiles wreathed their lips unwittingly, the blood, a moment before stagnant and ice-bound in their veins, chased like lightning through those crimson channels, and, without being in the least degree inebriated, they felt all the rapture of an indescribable bliss.

Turning towards the lady, both at the same moment, as if suddenly and simultaneously animated by the same idea, they took their hands and raised them respectfully to their lips.

'Pardon us, kind hostess," they said, "for having appeared to disobey you even for a single moment. We are overwhelmed with confusion and shame that such should have been our conduct: but deign to point out to us the means of retrieving ourselves in your good opinion——'

'You have already done so effectually, dear youths," interrupted the lady, 'by the oath which you have taken. And now, would you know how you can secure my friendship for ever, and perhaps induce me to break through that rule which, if enforced, would prevent you from visiting my mansions a second time——'

'Oh! lady tell us how we can secure your friendship!' ejaculated the youths, the burning hope that now sprang up in their hearts being now easily read upon their glowing and animated countenances: 'tell us how we can induce you to rescind in our favor that rule which bars your doors against a return to these realms of bliss!'

'The way to accomplish all this is easy, sweet youths,' said the lady, with a smile of such ravishing softness and looks of such entrancing delight, that the pages sank down at her feet with the involuntary but irresistible impulse of a worship and beatific adoration. 'All that I require of you,' added the lady, 'is that you now return to the saloon and that while rendering yourself as agreeable as possible to the fair beings to whom I shall present you, you hesitate not to plunge headlong into the fount of pleasure and enjoyment wherein all the rest will so fully steep their senses.'

As the lady thus spoke, she bent down—imprinted a burning kiss upon the forehead of each youth, and darted into their eyes at the same moment all the poison of her own bewitching looks: then gently rising them from their suppliant posture, she led the way back into the midst of the brilliant assembly.

The moment the lady and the two pages re-appeared, all eyes were cast upon the latter: but their joyous, radiant, and animated features instantaneously conjured up a smile of satisfaction to every countenance — and bright glances became brighter still as they shot forth from orbs in the depths of which an unmixed cheerfulness succeeded to an evanescent apprehension.

Conducting Lionel and Konrad through the glorious company, the lady paused at length in the presence of that bewitching creature whom we have already noticed, and who held the variegated fan in her hand. To this young lady the superb hostess introduced Lionel—that is to say, so far as an introduction could take place without the mention of each party's name: for the pages were not only unacquainted with even the appellation of the mistress of the mansion, but had not been questioned by her relative to their own names.

'My sweet friend,' said the hostess to the young lady with a fan, 'permit me to introduce to your notice a fair youth who is well worthy of the initiation which he has received into the mysteries of our earthly paradise. Your usual companion is not here to night——Oh! does a cloud pass over your countenance dear, girl?' exclaimed the mistress of the mansion in a tender tone, on observing that the young lady shuddered and became suddenly

mournful as that allusion to her *usual companion* fell upon her ears. 'Then hasten, I pray thee, and lose thy melancholy in agreeable conversation with this youth whom I present to thee!'

And thus was the introduction of Lionel effected.

The hostess then presented Konrad to the fair-haired young lady sitting next to the one with the fan; and, having thus done the honors of her mansion, she smiled upon the couples whom she had brought together and turned away to rejoin her own gallant, who was waiting for her at a little distance.

But here we must draw a veil over the scene: for it is not upon the present occasion, that the reader can become acquainted with the mysteries of this unknown mansion and its nameless occupants. The plan of our tale requires that the astounding revelation should be kept for a future chapter.

Suffice it now to say that it was six o'clock in the morning when Lionel and Konrad, having resumed their own apparel, quitted this abode of luxury and pleasure—and they were conducted back to the cemetery near Prague, blindfolded and on horseback, by the same old woman and under the same circumstances as before. At the burial-place they took leave of the crone; and then they hastily retraced their steps on foot to the Golden Falcon, which they reached before their master rose from his couch.

But did the enjoyments of the night bear the morning's reflections? Alas! no: the thrilling effects of the spiced wine had evaporated, and shame and confusion were in the faces of the young pages as they exchanged with each other looks which eloquently though silently expressed their regret at having yielded to the honeyed words whereby the old woman originally tempted them to embark in the mysterious adventure.

And now circumstances taught these youths, hitherto so frank, open-hearted, and unsophisticated, their first lesson in the school of hypocrisy: for they were compelled to assume a demeanor which would avert any suspicion that Sir Ernest de Colmar might form either of their having been abroad all night or of something strange and unusual having happened. But fortunately for them, their master did not observe their pale countenances and the air of fatigue and dissipation which their features wore; and thus were they spared the pain and conscious ignominy of having to give utterance to falsehoods.

Nevertheless, with all the excellence of principle and sterling appreciation of rectitude which characterised them, they would have condescended to duplicity and deception, had they been questioned by their master: for they had taken an oath to that effect—an oath, the words and circumstances of which wrung their soul with harrowing sensations, curdled the blood in their veins, and made their very hair stand on head, as they recalled it to their recollection!

CHAPTER XX.

THE COUNCIL OF NOBLES.

It was about nine oclock in the evening of the 2nd August; and the long talked-of Council of Nobles had now met, pursuant to appointment, in one of the gothic rooms of the Old Castle of Prague.

Fifteen or sixteen personages of rank and influence were thus assembled in solemn conclave, to deliberate upon the affairs of anarchical and distracted Bohemia; and the only representative of a foreign power present on this occasion, was Sir Earnest de Colmar.

The leading noblemen were the Marquis of Schomberg, the Count of Rosenberg, and the Baron of Altendorf. The two latter are already known to the reader; and it therefore only remains for us to observe that the Marquis of Schomberg was one of the richest men in Bohemia, and was recognised as the head of the old aristocratic party, whose opinions were also so strongly in favor of the Roman Catholic Church and consequently so inveterate in their opposition to Zitzka and his Reformers. The Marquis possessed a noble mansion and an immense estate at a short distance from Prague: he was a widower and childless, and though of despotic character, was generally considered to be a man of the strictest integrity and even austere in his habits and morals.

This nobleman was called upon to preside over the meeting; and he opened the business of the evening by requesting of Sir Ernest de Colmar to produce his testimonials as representative of the Duke of Austria. The Knight accordingly handed a roll of parchment to the Marquis, who, having hastily run his eyes over the contents, observed, 'The document is drawn up in due form; and the Council therefore recognises in his Excellency, the right worshipful Sir Ernest de Colmar, the envoy and plenipotentiary of his Sovereign Highness, Albert, Duke of Austria.'

'Stop!—one moment!' ejaculated the Baron of Altendorf, leaping from his seat

and rudely snatching the document from from the hand of the Marquis of Schomberg; 'I have my suspicions——'

'Suspicions" exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar laying his hand upon his sword.—'By heaven! the man who dares associate that word with my name or with aught concerning my affairs——'

'Peace, worthy Knight!' said the Marquis of Schomberg: 'Rest assured that you shall have justice done you. My lord of Altendorf, the precipitation with which your lordship has acted—alike in taking the credentials from my hand without even the slightest semblance of courtesy, and in giving utterance to an expression injurious to the representative of Austria——'

'I deny that he is Austria's representative!' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, vehemently. 'This credential, as your lordship terms it, is either a forgery——'

'A forgery!' thundered Sir Ernest de Colmar, springing from his seat and darting a terrible look upon the Baron. 'Proud lord! I fling back the base insult in your teeth—and I tell you that the imputation to which your tongue has ventured to give utterance, is a foul falsehood.'

An extraordinary sensation now prevailed among the personages assembled; some being inclined to take part with the Baron of Altendorf—others to espouse the cause of the Austrian Knight—and a third section evincing a disposition to be guided altogether by the example of the noble Marquis of Schomberg.

'My lords,' exclaimed this functionary, in a commanding tone, 'I must insist upon the restoration of tranquility, or the immediate dissolution of the Council will become inevitable. Such a catastrophe were most deplorable in the present unhappy state of Bohemia; and I appeal to your patriotism not to frustrate a grand object by means of petty dissensions. Let us now proceed calmly and dispassionately to investigate the incident which has just arisen. My lord of Altendorf, be seated—Sir Ernest de Colmar, I pray you to resume your chair. Some strange mistake has led to an imputation which the noble Baron will cheerfully withdraw and deeply regret, when it shall have transpired that the charge is thoroughly groundless. I therefore call upon the lord of Altendorf to state the grounds whereupon he has proclaimed so serious an accusation: and I commend Sir Ernest de Colmar to the due exercise of his patience until the time shall arrive for him to enter upon his reply.'

Manifestations of applause followed this sensible, temperate, and conciliatory address; and all eyes were then turned upon the Baron of Altendorf.

We must observe, however, that while the chairman was yet speaking, the Baron, availing himself of a moment when the looks of all present were fixed upon the former, dipped his forefinger into a small phial which he had concealed beneath his doublet, and rubbed the fluid rapidly over the bottom part of the document which he still held in his hand. No one perceived this manœuvre, so dexterously was it executed, and so absorbed at the moment was the general attention in the speech of the Marquis of Schomberg. The act was therefore accomplished and the Baron had completely recovered from any little excitement and confusion accompanying it, by the time that he found himself called upon to repeat and substantiate his charge against Sir Ernest de Colmar.

Rising slowly and in a dignified manner from the seat which he had resumed at the request of the chairman, the Baron of Altendorf spoke in the following terms and in a greater degree of insolent triumph as he proceeded:

'The document which the individual styling himself Sir Ernest de Colmar has presented to this most noble Council is indeed drawn up with so much regard to the usual form and manner of ambassadorial credentials, that I am not surprised if my lord of Schomberg should have been deceived and misled thereby at a first glance. I will however beg his lordship the Marquis in particular, and the other lords constituting this assemblage generally, to observe that in the preamble of the document the name of Sir Ernest de Colmar is mentioned simply, without stating the castle or mansion of his abode, and without specifying what office he holds at the Court of his Sovereign Highness the Duke of Austria. I therefore appeal to your lordships whether it be consistent with common sense to believe that the Duke of Austria would entrust so grave a mission to an unknown Knight, whose very place of residence is unnamed, and who does not appear to fill any situation of trust about the person of his Highness. This objection might be overruled, however, by some excuse or attempt at explanation, were I not enabled to support it by an argument which I believe to be unanswerable. I therefore declare most emphatically,' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, raising his voice to so high a key that it rolled like the swell of an organ beneath the groined and vaulted roof of the gothic apartment—'that there is no such Knight in the Austrian service as Sir Ernest de Colmar—no such name known at the Austrian Court—no such individual enjoying the confidence of his Royal Highness Duke Albert!'

An exclamation of mingled anger and amazement burst from the lips of all the assembled nobles—and every eye was at once turned, with suspicious and indignant glances, upon Sir Ernest de Colmar. And, of a surety, the conduct of the Knight was not calculated to remove the disagreeable impression created by the Baron's words with regard to him: for he appeared to be so overwhelmed with confusion as to be unable to utter a syllable. Nevertheless his hand sought his sword, the hilt of which it grasped convulsively; and then, his embarrassment suddenly subsiding, he resumed a look so full of placid dignity and calm confidence that his demeanor amazed and even overawed many of those who an instant before were ready to leap from their seats and expel him ignominiously as a vile impostor.

But not a word escaped his lips; and the Baron of Altendorf proceeded in a tone of enhancing triumph:

'Your lordship perceives that no denial is given to the averment which I have made; and I now recall your attention to this document which has been presented to us as a credential authorising the self-styled Sir Ernest de Colmar to take part in our deliberations and assist in our councils. Let us, then, even grant, for argument's sake, that he is no impostor—that he is in truth a Knight of Austria—that his name and title are as he would have us believe—let us grant all this, I say—and still, my lords, must we look with suspicion upon this document—still must we repudiate it with indignation—and still must we expel the bearer of it from our presence—for, behold! it bears not the signature of the Duke of Austria, nor the counter-signature of the Lord High Chancellor of the Austrian Duchy!'

''Tis false!—you lie, foul slanderer!' ejaculated Sir Ernest de Colmar, starting from his seat and half drawing his sword from its scabbard: while the utmost excitement and confusion prevailed in the room.

'My lords, judge between me and this insolent impostor!' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, throwing the document upon the table.

The Marquis of Schomberg took it up, and the nobles crowded around him with the most eager curiosity and intense anxiety to catch a glimpse of the paper: and, surely enough—as the Baron of Altendorf had affirmed—*the signatures were indeed wanting to the credential!*

'Wretched impostor' thundered several of the Bohemian noblemen, drawing their swords and rushing towards Sir Ernest de Colmar to inflict upon him the chastisement due to what they now looked upon as a foul deceit incontestibly proved.

'It suits me as well to vindicate myself with my sword as with my tongue!' exclaimed the Knight, his good weapon flashing in the eyes of those who were springing with such murderous intent upon him: and, placing his back against a pillar, he said, 'Come singly—or come all at once—and ye will not the less certainly meet your doom!'

'Villain!' cried the infuriate nobles—and a dozen swords clashed in an instant against the bright brand wielded by Sir Ernest de Colmar.

But ere a drop of blood was shed—ere another movement was made by the hostile parties—the Marquis of Schomberg and the Count of Rosenberg hastened to interpose; and, in brief but eloquent terms, they made their fellow-nobles understand how dishonorable it was to seek to punish the Knight without having allowed him an opportunity to utter a word of either explanation or defence.

These remonstrances restored tranquillity—the gleaming brands were thrust back into the scabbards—and every one returned to his seat, in order that Sir Ernest de Colmar might be permitted to answer the charge brought against him by the Baron of Altendorf.

Before the Knight, however, was called upon to speak, the Marquis of Rosenberg addressed the Council in a few brief and emphatic words, enjoining the members to vouchsafe as patient and attentive a hearing to the accused as they had already given to his accuser. And while the chairman was thus speaking, Sir Ernest de Colmar, having recovered all his wonted presence of mind and self-possession, glanced complacently around upon the assembly with a look in which a noble dignity and a proud confidence were imposingly blended.

But ere he had time even to intimate whether he would condescend to give any explanation at all, the door was suddenly burst open—and the terrible Zitzka appeared in the presence of the Council.

CHAPTER XXI.

ZITZKA AND THE COUNCIL OF BOHEMIAN NOBLES.

The sudden appearance of the formidable Taborite chieftain produced for a few moments a perfect consternation on all the members of the assembly with the exception of Sir Ernest de Colmar, who, as the

readers will remember, had been led to expect this proceeding on the part of Zitzka. But the Bohemian nobles were struck with amazement and even terror: for the thought flashed to their minds that the stern Reformer's presence was in itself a proof, that not only the Castle but even Prague itself must be in the possession of the Taborites. They therefore beheld themselves completely in the power of Zitzka; and brave though they naturally were, yet the conviction of thorough helplessness which burst upon their perception, prevented the hands which mechanically flew to the sword-hilts from drawing the weapons from their sheaths.

'My lords,' exclaimed Zitzka, in a tone of such confidence that the nobles indeed saw how hopeless was their position—how desperate their case,—'resistance will be vain! *My* followers are now in the garrison of Prague—*yours* have been disarmed. Every avenue of the Castle is guarded by the Taborites: escape is impossible—and any attempt at outrage against myself will be instantaneously frustrated and signally avenged.'

This intelligence, conveyed in such terse, brief, and emphatic language, filled the nobles with dismay—for they fancied that their existence was about to be sacrificed to the wrath of the Taborite chieftain. Determined however to sell their lives as dearly as possible, and simultaneously animated with the same resolution, they sprang from their seats—drew their swords—and were about to rush upon Zitzka with the intention of immolating him and then endeavouring to cut their way through his followers outside.

But, quick as thought, Sir Ernest de Colmar hastened to interpose himself between the rash Bohemian lords and the Taborite General,—exclaiming, 'Peace, insensate nobles! Would ye invoke a doom which this generous hearted warrior at present dreams not of awarding? Peace, I say: for he comes hither with the mien and aspect of one who is disposed to settle all difficulties by the tongue rather than by the sword!'

The Bohemian peers fell back suddenly, as if obedient to the voice of inspiration; and Zitzka, so unruffled that he had not even laid his hand upon his weapon, leant calmly and unceremoniously against a pillar as he darted a look of cordial recognition upon the Austrian Knight.

'Be seated, my lords,' said the Taborite chieftain at length; 'and I will explain to you the conditions upon which you may save your lives—those lives,' he added more emphatically, 'which you have forfeited by the dastard attempt that you were about to make upon me when the brave Sir Ernest de Colmar raised his voice and bade you listen to reason.'

''Tis as I thought!' ejaculated the Baron of Altendorf, unable to curb his fury at the check which the Council had so unexpectedly sustained, and seeking to vent his rage upon some one: ''tis as I thought!' he repeated: 'this Austrian impostor was a spy—in league with the Taborites——'

'Were it not a coward's deed to set one's foot on a fallen man,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a stern tone,—'I would give thee back the foul lie which thou hast uttered.'

'Lie!' thundered the Baron of Altendorf, now lashed up into an ungovernable passion: 'perish the traitor who dares thus to insult me!'

And darting forward like a tiger escaping from its den, the furious Baron aimed a tremendous blow at Sir Ernest de Colmar: but, although at the instant that the menacing weapon cut the air above the Knight's head, the sword of the latter was still in its sheath—yet, even more rapidly than the eye can wink, did it flash from thence—there was a sudden clang as the weapons met—and the huge brand of the Lord of Altendorf went whistling and whirling to the farthest end of the hall, where it fell with a loud metallic din on the stone pavement.

The Marquis of Schomberg and the Count of Rosenberg caught the Baron by the arms and drew him hastily back, as if thus snatching him from the well-merited vengeance of the Austrian Knight: but Sir Ernest, deliberately returning his sword to its scabbard, said, 'Fear nothing for your friend, my lords: I give him the life which *you* could not protect, were I bent upon taking it.'

'By heaven ejuculated Zitzka, whom this last incident had painfully excited; 'the Baron of Altendorf merits signal punishment for the outrage which he has essayed to perpetrate upon a Knight as truly chivalrous and honorable as ever wielded the cross-handled sword. What! is it thus, Bohemian nobles,' thundered the Taborite chief, his countenance becoming as terrible as his tone,—'is it thus that you would seek to conciliate my mercy and forbearance? Sir Ernest de Colmar is known to me, it is true; but he is no colleague of the Taborite—much less a treacherous spy! Would to God that he were indeed an ally of mine,' added Zitzka, with a strange emphasis and a look of peculiar significancy: 'but, alas! it is more likely that he will become an enemy!'

'Let us hope that it may be otherwise, brave Zitzka,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar

recovering from the mingled amazement and vexation which had suddenly seized upon him as the Taborite chief was giving utterance to the latter part of his sentence: then, hastily stepping close up to that formidable individual, the Knight fixed on his countenance a keen and searching look, observing in a low but emphatic whisper, 'You know who I am?'

'Yes,' was the response, delivered in the same under tone.

'Then keep the secret, brave Zitzka,' said the Knight: 'I adjure you, by the friendship which we pledged each other in your pavilion—by the rings which we exchanged——'

'Fear nothing,' interrupted the Taborite chieftain: 'your secret is safe with me!'

This dialogue only occupied a few moments, during which the Bohemian nobles resumed their seats at the council table, in order to testify their readiness to enter upon an argument of words with the Taborite chieftain, since the sterner reasoning of the sword was rendered so completely unavailing. Sir Ernest de Colmar, having exchanged with Zitzka the brief, rapid, but emphatic observation just recorded, returned likewise to his own seat, which he proceeded to occupy with a profound indifference and contempt for the threatening looks thrown upon him by the Baron of Altendorf.

'My lord,' exclaimed Zitzka, still leaning against the pillar, and appearing from that post to dominate the assembly with his formidable looks; 'before I address you upon the affairs of our country, it is meet and proper that I should again repudiate, as emphatically as Sir Ernest de Colmar has himself thrown back, the foul allegation that there is aught of a treacherous connexion existing between us. Widely as ye may differ from me in my opinion and in policy--my lords, inveterately as ye may detest me—deeply as ye may hate me,—yet, if ye speak the honest and impartial truth, ye cannot affirm that even the most malignant tongues have ever dared to impute habits of falsehood to John Zitzka! No—Zitzka never spake deceitfully—and ye may therefore believe him *now*, when he solemnly proclaims that a braver man, a nobler knight, or a more generous-hearted gentleman never breathed the air of this world than Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'I thank you gallant Zitzka,' said our hero, 'for thus frankly adopting the championship of my reputation so foully aspersed by the Baron of Altendorf; but 'tis a matter whereupon it were useless to bestow farther comment. Time will reveal many extraordinary things,' continued the Knight emphatically; and the day must come, my lords, he added, turning towards the Bohemian nobles, 'when ye will repent the readiness wherewith ye caught up the most injurious suspicions against me.'

The peers thus addressed gave no reply: the incidents which had occurred ere Zitzka made his appearance were still fresh in their memories, and the accusations of the Baron of Altendorf had left upon their minds an impression which nothing save a full and most satisfactory explanation could wipe away. Such an explanation did not however appear to be forthcoming: and if it really were that Sir Ernest de Colmar did not choose to condescend to give it, the nobles nevertheless felt well convinced that he was unable to afford any. So far as the imputation went that he was a spy of the Taborites, they took Zitzka's word to the contrary: but although released in their opinions from this charge, the Knight still lay under the suspicion of imposture in respect to his name, rank, and alleged position as Austrian plenipotentiary.

The circumstances attending the assembly had however taken so sudden and unexpected a turn in consequence of the appearance of Zitzka, that it now mattered but little to the Bohemian nobles whether Sir Ernest de Colmar were really the Austrian Envoy or not: and their eyes were now intently fixed upon the Taborite chieftain, from whose lips was so anxiously awaited the fiat that was to decree their fate—life or death, freedom or bondage!

And in a solemn tone and with impressive manner did the formidable Zitzka address the Bohemian noblemen assembled in that old gothic hall.

'I have already assured your lordships,' he said, 'that resistance would be fruitless, and that ye are completely in my power. The passages leading even to this apartment are thronged with my troops—and a single word from my lips would cause ye each and all to be hanged on the highest tower of the Castle within a few minutes, for the demonstration of a murderous purpose which ye ere now made against me. But I can afford to be merciful: nay, more—I seek to establish peace in Bohemia. Listen, then, to the terms which I have now to prescribe: give a patient and attentive ear to the conditions which I am about to explain. It is well known, my lords,' continued Zitzka, 'that the Princess Elizabetha is harbored in some place of concealment, doubtless in the hope that her name may sooner or later become a rallying-signal for the friends of monarchy. Equally certain is it that the late King was possessed of vast treasures, which disappeared from the royal palace at the same time with the Princess Elizabetha.

To reason upon the inference that this Princess retains those treasures, is unnecessary: the designing individuals who have spirited the Princess away into some impervious place of concealment, were not likely to have neglected the transportation of the gold and silver, the jewels and the precious stones, to the same spot. Hearken, then, my lords,' exclaimed the Taborite chieftain, raising his voice in a manner evincing his determination to listen to no remonstrance against the conditions he was imposing—'hearken, I say, to the terms which I prescribe as the only means whereby ye may save your lives from the executioner and your estates from confiscation.'

'And those terms?' ejaculated several voices, in a tone of deep anxiety.

'The surrender of the Princess Elizabetha and her treasures into my hands!' responded Zitzka.

'By heavens! I for one know not where her Royal Highness is concealed!' exclaimed a Bohemian peer.

'Nor I!' said the Count of Rosenberg, his countenance flushing with indignation: 'and even were it otherwise, I would sooner perish than deliver a helpless, orphan maiden into thy power!'

'My lords!' exclaimed the Taborite chieftain, sternly, 'I ask not who is aware of the Princess's abode, or who is not: neither do I seek to learn the course which each individual amongst you is inclined to pursue. But this assurance will I give you—that, as the Almighty is my judge! the Princess Elizabetha shall receive worthy and honorable treatment at my hands. I would sooner die the most horrible of deaths than injure a hair of her head. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the peace of Bohemia that she be removed from amidst those who may, as I ere now observed, make a rallying-signal of her name and use her treasures in the cause of those monarchial interests which never again shall become paramount in Bohemia. Now, therefore, your lordships understand me,—and three amongst ye must remain as hostages in my hands until the conditions be fulfilled. The Marquis of Schomberg—the Baron of Altendorf—and the Count of Rosenberg,' continued Zitzka, slowly selecting these peers from the rest, 'will be held in an honorable captivity within the walls of this castle, as guarantees that the Princess and her treasures shall be delivered up to me. Six weeks do I accord for that purpose; and if at the expiration of the interval my requisitions remain unattended to, the head of the Marquis of Schomberg shall roll upon the scaffold. Then another period of six weeks shall be allowed; and if the Princess and her treasures be still not forthcoming, the executioner shall be called upon to deal with the Baron of Altendorf.—A third interval of six weeks will then be accorded; and it will prove *your* fault, my lords, if in the end the Count of Rosenberg be likewise doomed to death! Should, however, such a catastrophe arrive, a fourth period of six weeks will be granted; and if, at the expiration thereof, neither the Princess nor her hoarded wealth should be in my power; then woe, woe to the city of Prague,' exclaimed Zitzka, his one eye flashing fire and his countenance becoming terrible to behold: 'for naught shall save it from my indignation; but I will surrender it to the sack and pillage of my troops, who will so utterly destroy it that not one stone shall be left upon another! Guards, come hither!'

And before the assembled nobles could recover from the consternation into which the speech of the formidable Zitzka had thrown them, the door was dashed violently open and the hall was filled with the Taborite warriors.

Their chieftain's orders were speedily given and as expeditiously obeyed: for while the Marquis of Schomberg, the Baron of Altendorf, and the Count of Rosenberg were hurried away to another part of the immense building in order to be retained in sure custody, the rest of the nobles were escorted from the hall—conducted out of the Castle—and then suffered to disperse whithersoever their inclinations or circumstances prompted.

The hall was cleared—Zitzka and Sir Ernest de Colmar alone remaining in it.

'I told you that I should be here this evening,' said the Taborite chieftain, turning with a smile towards the Knight; 'and I have kept my word. Prague is in my power once again: but it will be the fault of these nobles if the inhabitants sustain wrong or injury at my hands. Ah! they little thought that while encamped in the distant provinces, I was purposely suffering their machinations to reach a point that could not fail to render me the master of their lives and their liberties! But on these subjects we will converse at a future

occasion: at present I must repair to the barracks and attend to the quartering of my troops as well as to the disposal of the noblemen's retainers who have become my prisoners.'

Zitzka and Sir Ernest de Colmar then issued forth from the Castle, the Taborite sentinels on the drawbridge saluting their chief as he passed: and, having taken leave of the grim one-eyed warrior, the Knight slowly retraced his way towards the Golden Falcon to deliberate upon the course which he should now pursue under the altered aspect of Bohemian affairs.

For the struggle between Aristocracy and Republicanism had been brought to a speedy issue—and the imprisonment or dispersion of the representatives of the former had marked the signal triumph of the latter.

The Golden Falcon was already in sight, beneath the lustre of a refulgent moon, when a graceful female form suddenly accosted Sir Ernest de Colmar; and hastily thrusting a note into his hand, she retired with precipitation but not before our hero had time to recognise the features of Linda, one of the handmaidens of Satanais.

Thrusting the letter into the bosom of his doublet, he continued his way, and already was about to cross the threshold of the inn when he felt some one pull him abruptly by the sleeve. He turned—and beheld Beatrice, whose lovely countenance was only partially shaded by the thick veil which she wore.

The girl raised her finger to her lip—glanced significantly at the Knight as if to enjoin secrecy—then placed a note in his hand—and instantly hurried away with a lightness and a speed which gave her the appearance of a spirit melting into thin air.

Two letters!—delivered within a few minutes of each other—and by the handmaidens of Satanais!

Ah! well may the reader divine the impatience of Sir Ernest de Colmar to inspect the billets conveyed to him with so much mysterious caution; and, hastening to his chamber, he tore open the one that had been delivered by Linda. To his surprise, he found that it was signed by the *Daughter of Glory:* then, without waiting to peruse its contents, brief though they were, he opened the other; and at the first glance he beheld, as he suspected, the signature of the *Daughter of Satan.*

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN.

The scene now changes to the castle of Altendorf.

It was on the third evening after the incidents related in the two preceding chapters; and a lamp burnt dull and dimly upon the table of the State Chamber.

This was the apartment, as our readers will recollect, in which Sir Ernest de Colmar had passed the night, when he stopped at the feudal fortalice on his way to Prague; and it belonged to that wing of the establishment which had been shut up for so many years, and to which rumor assigned all the usual circumstances of superstitious terror, such as strange noises and unearthly appearances.

The faint and sickly rays of the lamp fell upon the pale, tear-bedewed, but surpassingly beauteous countenance of a young female, who was seated at the table, supporting her head in a languid manner upon her arm.

She was about twenty-three years of age, and although dressed in a homely peasant attire, yet a natural grace and unartificial elegance characterised her entire appearance. The neat boddice, which took its shape from the soft outlines of her form, was open in front; but her bosom, the virgin contours of which rose with easy and insensible swell from the finely expanded chest, was covered with linen of snowy whiteness. Her neck, long and tapering, arched superbly, supporting the well-shaped head with that graceful bend which the stalk of the tulip betrays.

Her contenance was a fine oval, and her features were cast in the most faultless style of that German beauty, which unites the classical perfection of Grecian outlines with the fair complexion of the north. Her forehead was high and broad, denoting the intellectuality of her character; her mouth small, and with lips of coral redness, had an expression of ineffable sweetness playing upon it, even in her most mournful moods; her nose was perfectly straight, and her chin well rounded, so that the finest outlines were given to a profile which Rembrandt would have loved to depict upon his canvas, in that half-vanishing light that threw out the glory of his conceptions into such life-like and magnificent effect.

Her eyes were not particularly large,

but of a deep melting blue, full of sensibility and softness, and shaded by long dark brown lashes. The character of her whole countenance was that of reflective sweetness and modesty, mingled with virgin dignity and the light of intellect.

Her complexion was very fair, having all the satin-like freshness of the camellia, touched with the pure tint of the rose; and the hue of the cheeks was enhanced almost into richness by the tinge of brown which the sun had painted there, and which denoted a vigorous health. But now, as we have observed above, an unnatural paleness marred the appearance of youthful freshness which she was wont to wear; and the shade of pensiveness that was her usual characteristic had deepened into a cloud of gloom, bordering upon sombre despair.

Parted above that brow, where virgin innocence and genius sate enthroned, like the twin queens of nature's own royalty, and flowing in undulations, which seemed to be waves of alternate light and shade, over her finely sloping shoulders, and down her back even to the waist, the maiden's luxuriant hair was a grand feature of her beauty. Not golden, like that of Gloria, and very far from being raven black, like that of Satanais, it was nevertheless such a flood of rich and massive tresses that might have made the envy of any empress. Of a light chestnut, almost approaching to flaxen, it was pale in hue, and yet shining with velvet glossiness; and as the fingers of the hand which supported her head played listlessly with a straggling curl, it seemed as if the finest silk, fresh from the cocoon, were twisting round alabaster delicately tinged with a roseate hue.

Such was the beauteous woman whom we find seated in the haunted apartment at Altendorf Castle.

The features of this room were precisely the same as when we described them in one of the opening chapters of our narrative. The fresh drapery and the clean linen of the bed contrasted strangely with the crumbling, decaying tapestry that was falling away from the walls; the sinking in of the velvet cloth spread upon the floor, showed where the boards had given way in several places beneath that luxurious carpet; and the crimson cushions only rendered the old furniture more antiquated in appearance.

It was ten o'clock in the evening, and the moon, the silver-crowned queen of the changing months, shone brightly from her celestial palace of deep, deep blue.

Rising from her seat, the maiden approached one of the windows, opened the casement, and looked forth. The moat shone like a river of quicksilver, and all was freshness, and fragrance, and moonlight without, as on that night when Sir Ernest de Colmar was himself an occupant of the State Chamber. But within the apartment naught save gloom, and darkness just rendered visible, and the earthy odor of mouldering tapestry and rotting furniture came upon the senses of the captive maiden.

For a prisoner she indeed was, in the right wing of Altendorf Castle; and she was no stranger to the reputation ascribed by rumor to that portion of the vast feudal structure. But, strong in her Christian piety, she scarcely thought that the Almighty would permit shapes of terror or supernatural sounds to appal a helpless, innocent maiden who never in word, or deed, or idea had offended against His laws. No; it was not the dead whom she now feared,—but the living; and if, as she gazed forth from the window, she measured with her eyes the width of the moat that lay beneath, it was because at the moment the thought flashed to her imagination that she might peradventure escape from the power of the persecutor who had torn her away from her home and rendered her a captive in that lonely chamber of evil repute.

But when she saw that the wall beneath the window went straight down into the water, and that its foot rested upon no embankment nor jutting margin on which she could alight were she to lower herself by a rope from the casement; she was about to turn away in despair, when her eye caught a glimpse of some white object moving amidst the trees that stretched from the forest towards the extremity of the right wing of the castle.

And now, indeed,—despite her religious confidence, her strong intellect, and her fervid reliance on heaven's goodness,—she could not resist the cold terror which seized upon her—she could not combat against the supernatural awe that crept, like an ice-snake, in unto her very heart, round which it seemed to coil!

Transfixed to the spot, and with a numbness passing through all her limbs, the maiden was unable to retreat from the window or even to avert her head.

Spell-bound, she was retained motionless and with her eyes rivetted on the object which was proceeding amidst the trees, like a spectral shape with measured steps and clothed in the garments of the grave.

A cry rose to the lips of the captive maiden; but terror froze it ere the tongue could give it utterance. Merciful heavens! were the rumors indeed true?—did the dead walk in the vicinity of that ancient fortalice?—and was night rendered hideous there by the appalling forms of ghastliness which the sepulchre gave up? Such were the thoughts that swept through her mind—such were the questions which she asked herself all in a moment, as her eyes still followed the spectral shape that was moving amidst the trees—*never once halting, nor turning aside, nor accelerating its pace, until it suddenly vanished, as if the earth had swallowed it up, or as if it had melted all in a moment into the air!*

Now was it that the spell which had sealed her lips and chained her limbs was suddenly lifted; and, with a faint cry, she staggered towards a seat on which she fell heavily.

But almost at the same instant the grating sound of a key turning in a lock met her ears; and, recalled to herself, she passed her hand rapidly across her brow as if to steady her thoughts and muster up all her resolution in order to encounter a painful ordeal. Steps were soon heard traversing the middle room which separated the one she was in from the ante-chamber communicating with the passage: the maiden compressed her lips tightly as if to keep down the feelings of mingled indignation and anguish which rose into her very throat; and, the door being flung open, Lord Rodolph entered the apartment.

'You may retire,' he said, in a short, imperious manner, to the steward Hubert, who, having attended him thither, was lingering upon the threshold; and the old man slowly withdrew, but not before he had cast a look full of sympathy and compassion upon the captive maiden, who failed not to perceive that she was the object of this evident friendly feeling on his part.

Thus retiring, in obedience to his young master's commands, Hubert closed the door, and the maiden was now alone in the State Chamber with Lord Rodolph.

He advanced towards her with an air of haughty confidence, and fixing his piercing dark eyes upon her countenance in a manner which showed that he sought at once to read the state of her mind in respect to himself. But in the dignified reserve which she assumed as she rose from her seat, he instantaneously recognised a perseverance in that determination which she had already manifested to treat his overtures with scorn and contempt.

'Three days have elapsed, sweet Angela,' he said, throwing as much tenderness as possible into his voice, 'since you became an inmate of Altendorf Castle ——'

'Not with mine own consent, my lord,' interrupted the maiden, in silver tones, which the agitation of her bosom rendered tremulously clear; 'but torn away from the home which I love and cherish—forcibly carried off by your lordship's ruffian myrmidons——'

'Oh! let not harsh words pass through those delicious lips, or jar against those pearly teeth!' exclaimed Rodolph, extending his arms towards her. 'You are adorable, lovely Angela—yes, adorable! and I worship you.'

'Touch me not, my lord!' she said, springing back as he advanced to seize her in a passionate embrace; 'touch me not, I command you!' she repeated, with a voice and manner so full of dignity that the youthful libertine was for a few moments overawed.

'How long is this folly to continue?' he exclaimed, almost immediately recovering his hardihood and audacity.—'Listen to me, Angela: listen to me patiently for a short time,' he proceeded, in a softer tone; 'and learn all that I intend to accomplish, and all that you have to expect.'

'I can scarcely believe that one so youthful in years has already grown old in iniquity,' said the maiden, in a voice of calm reproach.

'Your loveliness, Angela, is calculated to drive me to any extremes, in order to make you mine,' exclaimed Lord Rodolph. 'But hear me patiently, and you will then be better able to judge whether it is wise, prudent, or even availing for you to meet my appeals with contempt, my entreaties with scorn, my vows of love with looks of hatred. Oh, Angela! do not turn thus coldly away from me. A year has now elapsed since accident led me, while hunting in the Count of Rosenberg's forest, to the cottage where you dwelt. I saw you, and to see you was to become enamored of

you—to become enamored of you was to burn to possess you. Day after day did I roam in the vicinity of that cottage, hoping to receive a smile as a recompense for the respectful homage which I thus offered you. But no——'

'My lord, the long tale on which you have entered,' interrupted Angela, 'may be summed up in a few words. You declared your love for me, and, while acknowledging the honor which you conferred upon me by your preference, I frankly and firmly declared that your rank and my lowliness constituted an inseparable barrier between us.'

'And more, Angela, for you drove me to desperation,' cried Rodolph, impetuously; 'you assured me that you loved me not, and that you felt your heart could never be mine'

'Yes, I spoke thus candidly and ingenuously,' said the maiden, 'because your lordship pressed and urged me to declare my sentiments with frankness. But, instead of acting a chivalrous and generous part, you pursued me with attentions which I could not accept; and when I implored you not to drive me to the necessity of revealing to my adopted parents the importunity with which you pursued me—when I appealed to your better nature to abstain from a line of conduct which amounted to a persecution, you menaced me, my lord——'

''Tis true, Angela—most true,' interrupted Rodolph, 'for I loved you *then*—love you *now*, to desperation! I offered you my hand, as you already possessed my heart; yes, I, the son and heir of one of Bohemia's proudest peers—I, Lord Rodolph of Altendorf, humbled myself at the feet of the low-born peasant girl! And you scorned me——'

'No, my lord, not scorned you,' said Angela, mildly, 'I refused the honor which you proposed to confer upon me.'

'And yet you loved not another,' exclaimed Rodolph, in an impassioned tone.

'Nevertheless, my lord, I felt that my heart never could be yours,' rejoined Angela. 'As a friend, I could have esteemed you——'

'As a lover you abhorred me!' cried the young nobleman, becoming greatly excited. 'Then wherefore blame me if I sought to make you mine by force? wherefore upbraid me if I endeavored to bear you away a fortnight since, when the meddling Austrian fool rescued you from my power? or wherefore look with aversion upon me now, because the second attempt has been more successful and you are at last a prisoner within these walls and completely at my mercy?'

'At your mercy, my lord?' ejaculated the young maiden, the dread conviction that he indeed spoke the truth suddenly disarming her of the courage which her own virgin dignity had enabled her to maintain. 'Yes, oh! yes, I am indeed at your mercy,' she cried, in a tone of entreaty, 'but you will not continue thus to manifest yourself as a cruel, heartless tyrant towards me? You tell me that you love me? Then wherefore persecute me—wherefore do aught to fill my soul with anguish?—For three days past have I been a prisoner here; for three days have I been tortured with the cruellest reflections, not only concerning my own destiny, but likewise relative to the alarms which my adopted parents must experience at my unexplained absence!—Yes, my lord, I am indeed at your mercy! Every thing proves to me that such is the case,' she continued, glancing wildly round the room, 'and naught has yet occurred to show that you possess a generous heart. Else wherefore consign me to a chamber so long disused, and to which rumor attributes terrible things? Ah! my lord, was it to terrify me into a speedy submission to your will?' she demanded, suddenly recovering a portion of her lost courage, and now fixing upon the young nobleman a look which convinced him that she had indeed divined his aim in lodging her in the right wing of the castle. 'Then, hear me, Lord Rodolph—hear me!' she cried, her brow flushing with indignation; her fine Grecian countenance becoming expressive as that of an angry goddess; and her bosom swelling so proudly that it seemed as if it were about to burst the boddice which confined it, 'hear me,' she repeated, 'while I call heaven to witness that neither by entreaty nor by menace—neither by prayer or intimidation——'

'Hold!' exclaimed Lord Rodolph, in a sudden and terrible paroxysm of rage, 'hold, I say, haughty boauty, and perjure not yourself! For as there is a God above us, I swear that thou shalt be mine. And happy should'st thou be to reflect that instead of forcing thy stubborn virtue to surrender and reducing thee to the condition of a mistress, I propose to elevate thee to the rank of

a wife. Yes, declaim as thou wilt, and despite the risk of incurring my father's anger, I will wed thee, Angela; I swear that I will wed thee! Oh! thou art so grandly beautiful, that even in thine anger I adore thee: even when thine eyes dart forth lightnings, I could fall down and worship thee, my Angela!'

'My lord, as these are words which I ought not to listen to,' said the maiden, with a calm but firm dignity, 'it is not generous nor brave on your part, but rather the action of a coward, to take advantage of my captivity in order to insult my ears with offensive language.'

'Think you, proud beauty,' cried Lord Rodolph, his excitement again rising, 'think you that I had thee borne hither for the purpose of measuring my words or deeds to a nicety suitable to thy prejudices or notions? Far from it, Angela: and now listen to my resolve! To-morrow evening, at nine o'clock, the altar will be prepared in the Castle chapel. Innumerable wax-lights will diffuse their lustre through the sacred fane—the atmosphere will be fragrant with incense. And on the steps of the altar will stand the priest who shall unite us in holy matrimonial bonds. For *this* prepare yourself, my Angela: and oh! let me not be forced to have thee dragged an unwilling bride to that altar—but suffer me to lead thee thither with smiles upon thy lips, flowers on thy brow, and diamonds in thy hair—so that thou may'st be the pride of the handmaidens who shall have attired thee in thy virgin vesture, and the joy of him who would dare all the anger of men, all the wrath of God, and all the torments of hell rather than lose thee!'

It was with a wild and terrible emphasis that Lord Rodolph uttered these words—his eyes shooting forth lightnings, so unnatural was their brilliancy; and, seizing the hand of Angela, he pressed it to his lips with all the violence of a strong and ungovernable passion ere she could even make an effort to withdraw it. Then, suddenly dropping that fair hand which he had held for a few moments in a vice-like grasp, he rushed precipitately from the room.

Angela—pale, trembling, and overwhelmed with mingled grief and terror—tottered towards a chair, upon which she sank helplessly, while a deep moan escaped from her laden, bursting bosom.

But, holy God! that moan was echoed by a sigh so profound—so full of an ineffable anguish, that it floated audibly through the air,—a sigh which appeared to come from the farther extremity of the room,—the sigh of some spirit which her own had invoked in its agony!

An excruciating pang of fear armed the captive maiden with a desperate courage; and, springing from her seat, she darted towards the place whence that expression of rending woe had seemed to emanate. Raising the tapestry, she threw a terrified glance behind it, half expecting to encounter some spectral shape or ghastly object: but nothing save the dilapidated, damp, and broken wainscoting met her eye; and, endeavoring to persuade herself that the sound which had so strangely startled her was either a delusion or else one of those many unaccountable noises which are peculiar to rooms long disused and to old buildings, the captive maiden returned to her seat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BRONZE STATUE.

PAINFUL, most painful, was the reverie into which Angela now fell.

The unprincipled, heartless son of the Lord of Altendorf had spoken her doom. His intention was avowed—and in forty-eight hours she must accompany him to the altar!

But whence arose the indomitable antipathy which she entertained to the bare idea of this alliance,—an alliance which any other maiden of humble condition and peasant rank would have welcomed as the proudest, choicest gift that Fortune could bestow? For Lord Rodolph was not only the heir to vast estates, but was likewise both handsome and young; and a haughty triumph, therefore, might it have been estimated for the portionless and obscure Angela to win the heart of the Baron of Altendorf's son!

But in this light the maiden did not regard her conquest. She panted not for title and honors—and the tinsel appanage of hereditary rank dazzled not her eyes. Naturally of a strong mind, and having received much intellectual culture and many admirable lessons from a venerable priest who had not long been dead, she based her ideas of happiness upon more substantial grounds than those which have such brilliant attractions for shallow capacities. Her deceased preceptor's teachings had led

her to believe that marriage, under any circumstances a tedious venture, was especially hazardous when the heart accompanied not the hand; and, although Angela was too pure-minded to have ever allowed her imagination to give way to impassioned musings on the subject, yet she had not reached the age of twenty-three without sometimes pondering, but in a serious and healthy strain, on her future lot. And in such meditation had marriage necessarily been included; and then the maiden had been led to form her own ideal image and personification of all the attributes which should be possessed by the man to whom she could give her heart. He must be brave—for that was the age of chivalry,—a few years older than herself, with a countenance as expressive of frankness as characterized by manly beauty—and with an intellect not only powerful enough to impart charms to his conversation, but likewise to scatter the pearls of knowledge around upon the brows of his listeners.

Such was the perfect being whom Angela's imagination had pourtrayed as the model of a good husband; and she felt that on such a man she could bestow all the rich treasures of her virgin love, and surrender up her heart in the full confidence of entrusting it to worthy keeping. Cherishing therefore an ideal standard of man's perfection, it was not likely that the virtuous and pure-minded Angela would experience any sympathy for the young Lord Rodolph; for, inasmuch as his handsome countenance failed to make any impression upon her heart, his character and disposition had no qualifications to recommend him.

Though all the reasons we have advanced constitute a sufficient explanation for the unwillingness of the maiden to accept Lord Rodolph as a husband, there was yet a circumstance which tended to enhance that disinclination into a sentiment bordering upon horror.

What this circumstance was we shall now explain.

For in the midst of the mournful reverie into which Angela had fallen, when she returned to her seat after her fruitless search behind the tapestry, her hand, mechanically obeying the train of thoughts which were slowly passing through her mind, sought the bosom of her dress: and thence she drew forth a diminutive velvet bag, not longer than a crown piece, and suspended to her neck by a thin chain made of black hair.—This tiny bag was curiously embroidered with religious emblems and symbols, in the midst of which on either side was the name of ANGELA.

Having contemplated the bag for some minutes with an earnest and reverential attention, Angela drew forth its contents in the shape of a small slip of parchment, on which the following lines were traced in a bold masculine hand-writing:—

"July, 1434.—Angel, beware of Lord Rodolph! Brightly now shines thy star in the heaven, and sweetly smiles thy guardian angel: but if the soft language of Altendorf's heir become pleasant to thine ears, and if thine eyes give back loving glances to his own, then that star will set in blood, and those smiles will turn into bitter anguish. Oh, maiden! put faith in the unseen and unknown friend who thus proffers a salutary counsel and gives a timely warning: for better, better far were it that thou should'st perish even in thy sunny youthfulness, than hearken to the love tales of Rodolph of Altendorf. The curse of God would be upon thee, Angela, wert thou to accompany him to the altar!

"Maiden! to none must thou show this paper. Destroy it if thou wilt, but cherish its contents as thou would'st hold fast to thy eternal salvation. The murderer doomed to die would be an enviable being compared to thee, wert thou to neglect this solemn warning, written by one who watches over thee in secret."

Slowly and attentively did Angela read these lines, notwithstanding that they were already imprinted upon her brain as indelibly as if seared thereon with red hot iron.

And, oh! how was the mysterious warning to be frustrated and contravened by the ruffianism of that young noble who had resolved to drag her to the altar! It was terrible to contemplate: but in the depths of her own heart, Angela was determined to die rather than be forced into an alliance which, if the contents of that slip of parchment were true, was fraught with omens and auguries of so tremendous a nature in respect to her own destiny!

She had replaced the parchment in the bag, and had restored the bag itself to the bosom of her dress, when she heard a noise emanating from the entrance to the suite of apartments which Lord Rodolph had so designedly allotted to her. Rising from her seat, she listened attentively; for the thought that the young nobleman might intend

to violate the sanctity of her rest, suddenly sprang up in her mind, filling it with terror.

But it was a knocking at the outer door which she heard; and she was instantly reassured; for she reflected that inasmuch as Lord Rodolph retained the key that held her captive, he would not require to demand an admission which she indeed was not able, even were she inclined, to give.

What, however, could the knocking mean? For, after a short interval, it was continued, and with an air of impatience.

A ray of hope flashed to the mind of Angela. Was some generous hand at work to rescue her? was some unknown friend active in her behalf? It might be so; and, with a brief but fervent prayer upon her lip, she hastened to solve all doubts upon the subject.

Taking the lamp in her hand, she threaded the central room, passed into the anti-chamber, approached the outer door communicating with the passage, paused, and listened. At that moment the knocking was resumed on the other side of the massive door; and Angela hastened to give a responsive tap within.

Then all became suddenly still for a few moments, at the expiration of which the silence was interrupted by the crackling sound of paper at the maiden's feet. She looked down, and beheld a piece of parchment which had been thrust under the door, and which she hastened to pick up. There was writing upon it; and Angela, now full of mingled hope and suspense, ran her eyes over the following lines which had evidently been penned by a hand tremulous either with age or apprehension:

'Lady, you must escape! Behind the bed there is a door opening with a secret spring, the iron head of which resembles that of a large nail. That door will lead thee to safety, and away from the influence of those circumstances which now threaten thee with irretrievable perdition. He who pens these lines has not a moment to add another word of explanation.'

Overjoyed at the hope thus held out, and with a heart full of fervent gratitude for the unknown and unseen friend whom Providence had thus sent to her succour, Angela tapped gently at the huge door to intimate that she had found and read the paper; but no response was given, and she, therefore, concluded that the individual, fearful of being observed, had retired from the passage. It, however, flashed to her mind that the author of the cheering billet could be none other than the old steward Hubert; for she remembered the look of boundless compassion which he had thrown upon her that same evening when he attended Lord Rodolph to the State chamber.

Blessing him, therefore, with mental fervor, the grateful Angela tripped back with a comparatively light step and light heart to the spacious, gloomy, and dilapidated bed-room.

Placing the lamp upon the table, the maiden proceeded to inspect the position of the heavy bedstead with regard to the wall. To remove the huge, cumbrous machine was far beyond her strength: but fortunately there was just sufficient space to allow her to squeeze herself behind the solid head. Passing her hand slowly and carefully over the surface of the wainscot,—for it was too dark for her to use her eyes in that spot,—she at length encountered the secret spring, on pressing which the panel gave way, opening towards her. She thrust her arm into the aperture to convince herself that it was really an avenue of escape and not a mere closet or cupboard: but her hand came in contact with the inner door. For a few moments she was disheartened, fancying that her way was barred; until she acquired the certainty that it was indeed a door set in the solid masonry; and then her courage rose again.

Blaming herself now for having even for an instant doubted the reality of the instructions given in the note, Angela fetched the lamp from the table; and, squeezing herself back again behind the oaken head-board of the couch, she very soon discovered the spring opening the inner door. A flight of steps, leading down into the deep darkness, was now revealed; and unhesitatingly the maiden began the descent, carefully shading the lamp with her hand.

At the bottom of the flight, which went down to a considerable depth, there was a door. Angela experienced, however, little trouble in opening it; and her way was now continued along a narrow, low, and vaulted passage. Presently this corridor, ribbed and groined with solid masonry, turned off to the right with the abruptness of a right angle; and the maiden, still protecting the lamp with her hand, proceeded with slow but firm steps until she reached another door. The mas-

sive bolt which held it was drawn back by her taper fingers : she thrust it open —and another flight of steps appeared.

Bracing herself with all the courage which her strong intellect and vigorous mind could not fail to supply in order to enable her to meet the circumstances of her position, Angela descended this second flight of stone stairs ; and at the bottom she found the arched entrance of another vaulted corridor. Along this passage she proceeded until it brought her into a small room, quite round and with a vaulted roof, so that it at first looked like the interior of a dome ; but a second glance at its massive appearance and rugged surface made it seem more like a cavern hollowed in a solid rock. It was, however, built of mighty granite blocks, as well as the passages leading to it ; and, had ten thousand cannon been fired from the towers of the Castle, or the roar of heaven's loudest thunder rent the air, still would those thick stone walls have beat back all sounds from without, so that not even the faintest echo would have responded from within !

The maiden paused for a few moments in this circular chamber ; and kneeling upon a granite hassock in front of a crucifix standing in a high but narrow recess, she prayed fervently that heaven would grant a safe issue to her undertaking. Then, rising from the rude foot-stool, she opened a door facing the entrance from the long vaulted passage which had led her hither.

She now entered an apartment so spacious that the lamp shone like a feeble will-o'-the-wisp in the midst of the surrounding obscurity. Holding it, therefore, high up in order to obtain a better view of the place, she advanced slowly over the damp and slimy pavement,—a strange, vague, and unaccountable feeling of superstitious awe gained upon her at every step which she took.

Suddenly the rays of the lamp appeared to be reflected in something bright which stood out from amidst the deep darkness prevailing at the farther extremity of the room ; and, piously invoking heaven's aid, Angela drew nearer and nearer to the object, which as gradually grew more definite and distinct, until its shining outlines took the form of a colossal figure of the Virgin !

Then, yielding to the ineffable emotions of awe, and wonderment, and veneration which now asserted a complete empire over her soul, the maiden knelt down,—yes, knelt *there*, upon the humid pavement, and, placing the lamp by her side, joined her hands and moved her lips in fervent prayer.

And as she raised her eyes towards the stupendous statue, the light of the lamp playing quiveringly upon its features, gave them the appearance of smiling sweetly on the maiden ; and at the moment her mind was too profoundly enthralled by a superstitious feeling natural enough in her position, to enable her to pause and reflect, that those smiles were but the delusion of her senses.

She therefore continued to pray aloud with a fervor all the more profound ; and, rising at length from her suppliant posture, she took up the lamp and drew nearer still to the Bronze Statue.

But—O horror !—slowly and spectral-like, as if issuing from the depths of a sepulchre, a figure, apparently clad in the garments of the grave, emerged from behind the image ; and to the appalled imagination of the maiden its countenance was that of a corpse, and its eyes had the stony glare of the dead.

For a moment Angela stood transfixed and stiffened with an indescribable horror ; then, as the apparition began to move slowly towards her, making some sign which the palsy of her brain prevented her from understanding, the maiden gave vent to a wild cry, and sank senseless upon the humid floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WHITE LADY.

When Angela awoke to consciousness, she found herself seated upon a rude chair in an apartment she could not immediately scan in detail : for as the blood came back to her veins, terror revived in her soul ; and, while signs of resuscitating breath and returning knowledge broke from her lips, her looks swept round with shuddering furtiveness, lest they should encounter the ghastly apparition whose image floated uppermost in her mind.

But nothing terrible met her gaze : and closing her eyes, she threw herself back in the seat to give way to her reflections.

It appeared to her as if she had awakened from some hideous dream in which the dread phantoms of the ideal world had sprung up to appal her : but

rapidly did the various phases and incidents of the evening's adventures separate themselves from the chaotic confusion into which her swoon had thrown them; and as they settled down into their proper places in her brain, she was enabled to follow that thread of occurrences which, commencing with her escape from the haunted apartment, terminated at the point when she beheld a spectral form emerge from be hind the Bronze Statue.

Thus, within a few minutes from the recovery of her senses, she arrived at the conviction that she had been laboring under no dream,—unless indeed the appearance of the being clothed in the garments of the grave were a delusion conjured up by a disordered imagination.

Struck by the reasonableness of this conjecture, Angela opened her eyes and gazed slowly around. But she was no longer in the apartment where she had fainted; and moreover, instead of awaking to consciousness upon the damp, slimy pavement, she was seated in an arm-chair. Some one, then, had removed her while she was in a swoon; and was it a friend or an enemy? was it a kind hand which had succored her, or one that would turn the key of captivity upon her again?

With lightning speed, and almost with the same searing effect, did these thoughts flash through her brain? She dreaded the worst—the very worst: her mind, still attenuated by the lingering influence of the swoon, was far more sensitive to the cruellest apprehensions than susceptible of the anodyne of hopeful reflections. Shudderingly she a gain cast her eyes around to ascertain where she was. A lamp—not the one which had fallen from her hand when her senses abandoned her—burnt upon a table, amidst various mechanical implements, jars filled with liquids and mineral substances, and brushes of various sizes. The breeze came refreshingly upon the maiden's countenance from a loop-hole in the wall facing her; and the zephyr, as it cooled her throbbing brows and fanned her cheeks now flushing with the excitement of alarm and suspense, played kissingly with the soft pale tresses that had become dishevelled with the swoon.

Where was she, then?—to what apartment of Altendorf Castle had she been borne?—and whose hands had conveyed her thither?

But, hark! a voice steals upon her ears,—a voice so low, plaintive, and tremulous that in its tone it is even more reassuring than in its words: for hypocrisy and guile never simulated so much tenderness mingled with touching melancholy as was expressed in the former—whereas deceit and treachery are so easily woven into language.

'Maiden, fear nothing! It was no being of another world that you beheld ere now, and whose too abrupt appearance terrified you so profoundly: but it was, alas! an unhappy woman who hath drunk so deeply of the cup of affliction that her individual woes and wrongs would outweigh the accumulated miseries of millions! Fear nothing, therefore, gentle maiden, at the hands of one who would sooner perish than injure a hair of thy beauteous head!'

Thus spoke the voice: and Angela, rising slowly from her seat, turned towards the door which was behind her, and from which direction the words came. Something white gleamed in the midst of the obscurity which shrouded the passage beyond the threshold; and a shudder passed over Angela's frame as the outlines of that same form which had already so cruelly terrified her, gradually developed themselves to her view. The figure advanced—the maiden, ashamed of her fears and thinking of the sweet, plaintive voice which she had heard, mustered up all her courage—and, with slow and measured tread, the same being that had scared her entered the apartment.

But there was nothing terrible—nothing ghastly in her appearance now! The delusion which had agitated her traits into spectral horror to the imagination of the young maiden, was dissipated; and all the feelings of alarm and consternation which had ere now ruled Angela's mind, gave way to a boundless sympathy and an immense commiseration as she contemplated the woman who had proclaimed herself to be so surpassingly unhappy.

That she was of gentle birth and rearing, her manners and her language bespoke; and her countenance, though deadly pale and bitterly care-worn, retained the traces of beauty. That is to say—her delicate profile was excellent; her teeth were white, even, and well preserved; and her eyes were of a fine blue, although in their depths naught save woe and the heart's desolation were expressed. What her age might be, it was scarcely possible to conjec-

ture; for her lineaments had evidently been changed by grief rather than by time; and though forty winters might have passed over her brow, whole centuries had poured their bitterness into her heart.

She was attired in the white garments of a Carmelite nun; and thus no wonder was it if her vesture had appeared, at the first glance, like the apparel of the dead to the disordered imagination of Angela. And this sepulchral aspect was enhanced by the corpse-like pallor of the lady's countenance,—a pallor so free from vital tint that it deprived the features of all vital semblance.

Such was the being who now stood in the presence of Angela; and, every sentiment of fear having vanished from the maiden's mind, she gazed upon that lady with an illimitable sympathy expressed in every lineament of her beauteous face. And, on the other hand, the lady herself contemplated Angela with a profound and touching interest,—so that it seemed as if there were some circumstances or some secret springs of affection that taught two spirits, made kindred by adversity, to blend in the warm transfusion of tenderness and compassion.

'Angela,' said the lady at length, in that same soft and plaintive tone which had already produced such an effect upon the maiden; 'be seated for a few minutes, and rest yourself after the privation of sense which you ere now experienced. Your escape from the castle will be ensured; fear nothing, therefore, upon that head. But in the meantime it is necessary, imperatively necessary, that you should lend a patient and attentive ear to the counsel which I am about to give you, and that you should prepare to adopt, without even a murmur of hesitation, the course which it is my duty to mark out for you to pursue.'

'Lady, you have addressed me by my name,' said Angela, reseating herself; 'and the kind manner in which you have spoken, proves likewise that you not only know me, but that I have been fortunate enough to deserve your sympathy.'

The lady turned away for a few moments, and a deep sob, which she vainly endeavored to stifle, came floating upon the ear of Angela. From her seat sprang the generous-hearted maiden; and, taking the lady's hand, she exclaimed, 'You entertain an interest in me and my welfare, and you are unhappy! Oh, suffer me to console you—permit me to offer you all the solace which it may be in my power to bestow. I will weep with you—I will pray with you—I will endeavor to bring back smiles to your lips——'

'Smiles!' ejaculated the White Lady, with despair, but hot bitterness, in her tone; 'oh! no—never—never! But let us not talk of my griefs, Angela—they are long-standing, profound, and irreparable. All that concerns yourself is at the present moment of interest to me. You asked me if I knew you: need I do more than direct your attention to the little velvet bag which you were ere now examining in the State Chamber?'

'Ah, then you saw me, and yet you yourself, lady, were unseen?' exclaimed Angela, a momentary revival of superstitious feeling coming over her. 'Yes, and that sigh which I heard——'

'Let us not waste precious time in unnecessary observations,' said the lady. 'It is for you to listen, Angela, and for me to speak. Yes, I know you; and it was I who caused that velvet bag, with the warning which it contains and the hair chain to which it is attached, to be secretly placed in your way. But, alas! circumstances so enthral my tongue, that I dare not venture upon even the slightest, faintest, smallest explanation of *my* motives, or of the perils against which I have thus forewarned *you*. If you will believe that I am sincerely, deeply interested in you—if you will consent to follow my counsel, in the conviction that its aim is entirely and solely for your good, and if you will give me credit for the best motives and the holiest purposes, without demanding a single explanatory word from my lips, then, maiden,' added the White Lady, her tone assuming a more solemn earnestness and a deeper pathos, 'then will you be acting wisely towards yourself, and kindly towards me.'

'Oh! yes; I will place a blind confidence in you,' exclaimed Angela, profoundly touched; 'and it will prove a source of indescribable happiness to me if I can indeed alleviate any portion of that appalling load of affliction which weighs so heavily upon your heart.'

'Listen, then, my dear Angela,' resumed the lady, caressing the maiden's beauteous countenance with her thin, white hand. 'Hitherto you have been unaware that you are the victim of circumstances so strange, so sad, so mys-

terious that, if written in a book, they would constitute a romance so wild that never did human imagination conceive the like. But over this tremendous narrative the same dark veil which has hitherto concealed it must continue to hang; and inasmuch as I dare not attempt to raise it, so would you, Angela, only be aggravating the misery which I now endure were you to demand explanations which I cannot give. Nevertheless, it is that combination of circumstances to which I have thus distantly alluded, that compels me to recommend the course which I am about to implore you to adopt.'

'There is so much earnestness—so much unartificial sincerity in your tone and manner, lady!' observed Angela, 'that I am already prepared to promise a full and unreserved compliance with any plan which you may suggest for my welfare.'

'The good angels be thanked that you are thus confiding and reasonable, my child,' exclaimed the White Lady,' clasping her hands fervently and raising her eyes with an expression of ineffable gratitude. 'In the same manner that I became aware of the fact that you ere now examined your little velvet bag in the State Chamber, so did I ascertain the arbitrary and violent intentions of Lord Rodolph towards you. Yes; I am no stranger to the terrible menaces which he uttered; and I fear, alas! that he is fully capable of carrying them into execution. But as that solemn warning declares; as that slip of parchment which you wear in your bosom affirms, the doom of the condemned murderer were preferable to thy lot, should'st thou become the wife of Rodolph of Altendorf!'

A cold shudder passed through the maiden's frame as these words fell upon her ears; for the thought flashed to her mind that although she might escape at present from Lord Rodolph's power, it would in future require some stronger hand than that of Wildon the forest-keeper to protect her against his importunity and his violence.

'I do not ask if you love the Baron of Altendorf's son,' resumed the White Lady, after a few minutes pause, 'because I am well aware that your heart reciprocates not the indomitable passion which he has so unfortunately conceived for you. But neither your virtue, nor your indifference towards him, nor your maidenly reserve, will suffice to shield you from the intrigues which he may set afoot, or defend you against the outrage which his maddening desires may urge him to perpetrate.'

'What, then, must I do lady?' asked Angela, appealing to the mysterious Carmelite as if she were seeking the counsel of a mother.

'There is but one course to pursue, my child,' was the impressive response. 'Oh! need I prompt you how to act when your happiness in this world and your salvation in the next are so terribly compromised? But, tell me, Angela, what would you do if you found yourself in a spot where a venomous serpent was already erect and hissing to spring upon you——'

'I would fly, lady; I would fly!' exclaimed the maiden. 'And now I comprehend what my duty is in respect to Lord Rodolph of Altendorf,' she added in a tone whose decision indicated the firmness of which her mind was capable when she met danger or emergency face to face.

'Yes, Angela, you must fly from the perilous vicinage of Altendorf Castle,' resumed the White Lady, 'you must quit that forest-home in which you have dwelt so long; you must bid farewell to the worthy couple who have supplied the place of father and mother unto you.'

'Oh! lady,' exclaimed Angela, clasping her hands despairingly, 'you seem to speak as if I had friends in readiness to afford me an asylum when I abandon the one which has so long protected my orphan head. But I am friendless, lady—poor——'

'Angela, Angela!' interrupted the Carmelite, tears now starting forth from her eyes upon the long sable fringes which in their jettiness enhanced the alabaster pallor of her countenance, 'you know not how profoundly you afflict me by giving way to this despondency. A minute ago, and you were nerved to encounter your destiny with boldness; and now you are disheartened again. But cheer up, Angela; God will not desert you; and it may be that much happiness will arise from the course which I am about to point out for you to follow.'

'Proceed, lady,' said Angela, 'I am all attention, all obedience, and all gratitude; for though the interest which you have taken in my welfare be mysterious and unaccountable even beyond any conjecture which the wildest flight of imagination may form, yet do the profound and stirring intuitions of my

soul command me to yield unto thee such an obedience as a child should manifest towards a parent. Speak, then, dear lady, tell me what I am to do, and your words become the ruling influence of my destiny.'

'Were I to consult my own inclination, Angela,' said the White Lady, so profoundly affected that she could scarcely give utterance to her thoughts, 'I should not be in haste to recommend your removal from a neighborhood where we might meet again. But your own welfare demands your prompt departure hence; and circumstances induce me to advise that you repair without delay to Prague.'

'To Prague, lady!' ejaculated Angela.

'Yes; to our Bohemian capital,' was the emphatic response, 'where you will find the Count of Rosenberg, in whose service your adopted parents are.—Doubtless he has frequently seen you?' she observed inquiringly.

'Oftentimes,' returned the maiden,' 'and his manner has ever been kind and condescending towards me, as if his were a heart that could feel for my orphan lot. But he is unmarried, lady; no female relation dwells with him,' continued Angela hesitatingly, and with a blush upon her virgin cheek, 'and it were, therefore, unseemly in me to implore his protection.'

'His age is more than double thine, my child,' said the lady, 'and thy virtue, joined to the known chivalrous character and honorable disposition of the Count of Rosenberg, will strike the tongue of scandal dumb. It is agreed, then, that you repair to Prague, and that you throw yourself at the feet of the Count of Rosenberg to implore his protection against the young noble who is insensate enough to tear you even from the sacred cloister of a convent were you to seek an asylum there.—But now, Angela, I am about to give you certain instructions which may startle you, which may even engender mistrust in your mind——'

'I can entertain no suspicion injurious to *you*, dear lady,' exclaimed the maiden, in a tone gushing with the fervid feelings of illimitable confidence.

'God has indeed moved your heart towards me!' said the Carmelite, devoutly crossing herself. 'And may He still sustain the faith which you now place in me, nor suffer that holy reliance to be impaired by the injunctions which an imperious necessity compels me to pour into your ears. For, when we part presently, maiden,' continued the White Lady, with an almost awe-inspiring solemnity of tone, 'you must make up your mind to look on me as one belonging not to this world, but to the great congress of the dead! Nay, more, never must you breathe to mortal ears the circumstance of our meeting within these walls to-night. Think of me, if you will; oh! yes, think of me often, but speak of me *never!* In relating to your adopted parents the incidents of your escape from the Castle of Altendorf, make no mention of such a being as myself; and when a few days hence you will be telling your tale to the Count of Rosenberg, I conjure, I implore you, Angela, to be equally reserved, equally silent, equally dumb respecting *me*. Oh! if you only knew how much depends upon this secrecy on your part; if you could only form a conjecture how grave and solemn are the interests that would be compromised by a word inadvertently dropped from your lips; you would not hesitate even to fall upon your knees and swear by all your hopes of happiness in this world and salvation in the next, to obey the injunctions which I have now given you.'

'Lady, I swear!' exclaimed Angela, sinking at the feet of the Carmelite, whose hand she took and pressed to her lips in token of gratitude, obedience and sympathy.

'May the Eternal shed his choicest blessings upon thee!' murmured the White Lady, bending down and imprinting a long and fervent kiss upon the polished brow of the beauteous Angela. 'And now rise, my child, rise,' she exclaimed abruptly, as if afraid even to trust herself upon the current of her own feelings; 'rise, and let me conduct thee hence, for 'tis verging fast towards midnight, and you must be on the road to Prague betimes in the morning.—Come, follow me; you will soon breathe the air of liberty once again; and the interval which we have passed in conversation has allowed ample leisure for certain arrangements to be made in respect to the means of your return home to-night, and the journey which you are to commence to-morrow.'

Thus speaking, the White Lady took the lamp in her hand, opened a door belonging to a deep recess in one corner of the room, and led the way down a steep flight of stone steps, the maiden following close behind her mysterious guide.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHAMBER OF THE MACHINERY—THE VAULTS.

At the bottom of the granite staircase there was a narrow passage, vaulted like all the others which the maiden had threaded this night, and the rugged walls of which bespoke a massiveness that gave the idea of a living sepulchre. The White Lady held the lamp high up, so as to afford the maiden the full benefit of its rays; and as she thus carried the flickering pensile flame, a disturbed fancy might have assimilated it to a will-o'-the-wisp borne by the hand of a spectral figure through an atmosphere which seemed one solid mass of darkness. For there was something awfully solemn in the spectacle of that lady clothed in garments of such gleaming white, moving slowly through the deep subterranean of a castle to which rumor had so long attributed supernatural terrors; and having already said enough with her own lips to convince the maiden that some tremendous mystery enveloped all the circumstances of her existence.

But Angela had not many minutes to make these reflections, for the rippling of water soon began to murmur gently upon her ears, and almost immediately afterwards she was conducted by the White Lady into a vaulted chamber, small but lofty, and where a spectacle as strange as it was terrible slowly developed all its hideous details to her view.

Amazed and horrified, bewildered with all the most startling feelings of wonder, and all the keenest emotions of alarm, Angela's looks were rivetted and her senses were absorbed in the contemplation of that frightful mechanism, which has already been so minutely described in an early chapter, and which stood slowly out from the obscurity as the White Lady approached nearer with the lamp, and as the maiden's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom that was thus lighted up.

Yes, there were the six vast wooden cylinders, covered with innumerable iron blades, and furnished with the coils of rope, and one huge heavy weight, belonging to the motive-power of the diabolical machinery! Above was the trap-door set in the vaulted roof, and beneath flowed the deep stream, rippling from under an arch in one wall, and disappearing through that of another.

Without entertaining any definite or positive idea of the purposes which this machinery was made to serve, a petrifying horror sprang up in the mind of the maiden, the blood ran cold in her veins, the flesh crept upon her bones, and a glacial sensation of indescribable dread seized like a numbness upon her limbs, her heart, and her brain, as the various features, combinations, and details of the mechanism slowly developed themselves to her view. For, even as the child recoils with intuitive dread from the presence of the snake which starts up in its path, and which it beholds for the first time—even, also, as the hair would bristle upon the head of a savage were he shown a rack, an iron boot, a thumb-screw, or any other instrument of fiendish torture. though none of their uses should be precisely comprehended by him at the moment; so was it with the affrighted Angela, as she shrank in horrified amazement from the presence of the tremendous machinery, which she knew to be something dreadful, but the infernal nature of which she could not precisely understand.

'Angela,' said the White Lady, in a tone indicative of a profound affliction, the expression of which she evidently attempted to subdue as much as possible; 'I would fain have spared you the necessity—the painful necessity—of gazing on this appalling proof of that ingenuity which Man, alas! so often exercises for the most fiendish of purposes. But there was no other way by which I could have conducted you forth from the Castle: it was therefore imperative upon us to pass through this subterranean vault of terrors.'

'O, lady!' exclaimed Angela, whose cheeks had been rendered by cold horror almost as devoid of coloring as those of her mysterious guide; 'a secret voice appears to whisper in my soul that, although this machinery is still and noiseless, yet there is death in its mighty wheels were they set in motion, and the rending shrieks of human agony in the sounds that its creaking axles would send forth!'

'Merciful heaven!' ejaculated the lady, her white garments shaking with the effects of the cold shudder which passed thus visibly over her form; 'question me not, I implore you! On the contrary, Angela, dear Angela,' she continued, with more feverish excite-

ment than she had yet exhibited throughout her interview with the maiden, 'I beseech you, in the same manner in which I ere now enjoined you to maintain an inviolable secrecy respecting myself,—I beseech you, I say, to put a seal upon your lips with regard to all the mysterious or terrible things that you have this night beholden in Altendorf Castle. The maze of passages which you have threaded, the Bronze Statue before which you have knelt, and now, this dread mechanism that has filled your mind with vague horror and ineffable forebodings,—all, all must be regarded by you as something whereupon it is even sinful to think, but concerning which it would be darkly, deeply criminal to breathe a single word to the ear of another!'

'Fear nought, lady, from any indiscretion on my part,' said Angela, her tone and manner recovering a considerable portion of their wonted firmness. 'I owe you too large a debt of gratitude for all you have said and done for me this night, to disobey your injunctions.'

'Again I thank thee, my dear child,' returned the Carmelite. 'But come—let us leave this dreadful place; let us continue our way! It was at first my intention to have implored you to blindfold your eyes ere you quitted the chamber where you awoke to consciousness after your swoon; but the frankness, the candor, the willing promptitude with which you there assented to all the injunctions I gave you respecting myself, determined me not to insult nor impair the generous confidence which you placed in me, by subjecting you to such a process. I therefore preferred that you should even encounter the risk of being horrified and terror-stricken by the sights that would meet your view while pursuing the path that leads to safety, rather than that the slightest suspicion should be engendered in your mind respecting the integrity of my motives.'

Having thus spoken, and without waiting for a reply, the White Lady traversed the chamber containing the diabolical machinery; and, pushing open a door, she led the way through a passage which terminated in a long succession of vaults, supported by low massive pillars, and the groined archways of which would have given it the appearance of a gloomy subterranean prison, had it not been filled with tombs and the monuments of the dead.

'Around you, Angela,' said the White Lady, holding the lamp high up so as to afford her as complete a view of the place as possible, 'around you are the sepulchres of the proud family of Altendorf. Every Baron and every Baroness who have borne that haughty name, and who have paid the debt of nature, are interred within these vaults and have received the vain posthumous honor of a statue, a monument, or a mural tablet.'

The Carmelite and Angela had halted, as the former thus spoke, in the immediate vicinity of a tomb of black marble with the sculptured recumbent effigy of a lady upon it, extended, and with the hands slightly raised and joined as if in prayer. Upon the side of the monument there was an inscription formed of inlaid brass; and as the lamp shed its rays on the bright metallic letters, Angela read with ease the following lines:

Here rest the remains
of
ERMENONDA, BARONESS OF ALTENDORF;
whom Death did snatch away,
in the spring-tide of her youth and the glory of her beauty, from a husband by whom she was loved most tenderly.
Peace be to her soul—to her ashes peace!
Died August 25th, 1415—Aged 20.

The White Lady did not interrupt Angela while she was reading the above inscription: but when she perceived, by the direction which the maiden's eyes took from the brazen epitaph to the sculptured figure lying along on the summit of the tomb, that she had finished the perusal, she said in a low, deep tone, 'This is the monument of the present Baron's wife—consequently of Lord Rodolph's mother!'

'Alas! poor lady,' observed Angela, profoundly affected by the solemnity of the scene, and by the reminiscences of all that rumor had ever wafted to her ears respecting the deceased Baroness Ermenonda; 'she died early, and I have been told that her death was sudden and mysterious——'

'Hush! repeat not here the suspicions which float elsewhere,' interrupted the Carmelite. 'Twenty years have elapsed since the date assigned to her demise; and during that period there has been ample time for calumny to invent strange and wondrous tales, and for scandal to repeat them. But if your sympathy be indeed excited, Angela, by the fact that the last lady who bore the title of Altendorf went down to the grave *in the spring-tide of her youth and the glory of her beauty*,—and if your tender heart be touched by the reflec-

tion that she was even younger by three years than yourself when Death thus laid his icy hand upon her, then let us kneel down together, Angela—yes, let us kneel, my dear child, and pray for the soul of the Baroness Ermenonda!'

And they knelt and prayed accordingly; and, their pious intercession being terminated, they rose from their suppliant posture and pursued their way through that sombre wilderness of tombs. These memorials of the dead exhibited every variety of form, style of sculpture, and fashion of enrichment, peculiar to the centuries during which they had been accumulating; the primitive stone coffin which may be termed the Christian sarcophagus, the catafalc with its lavishly decorated architecture, the table tomb with the plain surface and pencilled sides, the effigy monument such as that of the Baroness Ermenonda, medallions, mural tablets, and facade, compositions with columns, pediments, and niches. And as some were of white marble and others of black, the gleaming of the former and the sombre shades of the latter, stretching away on every side until the deep darkness appeared to engulf them, produced not only a grand contrast, but also effects at once striking and awe-inspiring.

Through these spacious vaults did the White Lady and Angela pursue their way; and in a few minutes they reached a large iron grating, communicating with a wide and handsome ascent of marble steps which, as her mysterious guide informed Angela, led up to an oratoria where, when a member of the Altendorf family died, it was the custom to perform the service of the dead, ere the coffin was borne down into the vaults to be consigned to the sepulchre prepared to receive it.

It was not, however, by the iron grating that the Carmelite and the maiden proceeded; but having thus reached the extremity of the central avenue that divided the place of tombs, the former turned abruptly off to the left, followed by the latter. Skirting the low and massive wall, beneath the groined arches, they hurried on for a short distance, when the White Lady suddenly paused and opened a small door with a key which she took from beneath her garments; then, having admitted herself and Angela into a narrow passage, she carefully locked the door again.

This passage, which they now threaded rapidly, sloped somewhat precipitately downward for a little distance; then it was continued in a straight line, and ultimately it rose with an ascent as steep as the declivity in the first instance had been abrupt. At the extremity a dozen stone steps led upward, but were closed by a trap-door overhead. This the White Lady raised without difficulty; and, having extinguished the lamp, she gave her hand to Angela, who, emerging safely, found herself inside a little chapel, open in front, and standing amongst the trees which stretched from the forest towards the extremity of the right wing of the castle.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUBERT.

THE fresh breeze of heaven fanned the maiden's cheek, the silver moon bathed in silver the scene that met her eyes, and she found herself not only beyond the precincts of the feudal mansion, but with the deep moat rolling between the spot where she stood and the walls of that vast establishment. It required, however, but a brief and slight excercise of the judgment, and of the faculty of calculating distances, to enable Angela to perceive that it was the last passage which she had threaded, with its downward and its upward slope, that led beneath the moat of Altendorf Castle.

The trap-door, which fitted with a marvellous accuracy into the floor of the little chapel, was immediately closed by the Carmelite, who, hurrying Angela away from the spot, led her into the deep recess of the forest. Having proceeded thus in silence for nearly ten minutes, they reached a narrow path winding amidst the trees, and which was well known to Angela, inasmuch as it led in the direction of Wildon's cottage—that home whereof the maiden was doomed by Rodolph's persecution to take leave, heaven only knew for how long!

In the deep shade of the overhanging trees, a horse, ready caparisoned with a pillion, was standing; and Hubert, the old steward, was holding it by the bridle. He said nothing, but as he came forward and the moonbeams played upon his countenance, an expression of satisfaction, mingled with anxiety, was read on his features. Taking a heavy purse from the bosom of his doub-

let, he presented it to the White Lady, and then he glanced from her to Angela, and back again to the former, as if there were something weighing upon his mind, but to which he felt disinclined to give utterance.

The maiden murmured words of deep gratitude, alike to the mysterious Carmelite and the old steward, for the assistance which they had rendered her; and when she beheld the glistening tears rolling down the colorless cheeks of the lady, she threw herself into her arms, exclaiming 'Oh! I have known you but for a short hour, and I love you as if you had cherished me from my birth!'

'Dearest Angela,' murmured the Carmelite; and the next instant they were straining each other in a fond embrace.

'In the name of heaven! waste not the moments which are now so precious,' cried the old steward, at length breaking silence, and passing his hand rapidly across his eyes as he beheld this affecting scene. 'I conjure you not to yield to any weakness——Lady! beware,' he ejaculated, pulling the Carmelite's loose hanging sleeve with some degree of violence, 'this is a period when you have need of all your strength—for I have evil tidings to communicate——'

'Oh! can there be fresh miseries in store for me?' exclaimed the White Lady, suddenly withdrawing herself from Angela's embrace and turning towards the steward. 'Speak, delay not, keep me not in suspense——'

'I implore you to tranquillize yourself, lady,' said Hubert, in an emphatic tone, 'and I will tell you all I know.—On quitting the State Chamber this evening, after his interview with you,' and he glanced towards Angela, 'Lord Rodolph was preparing to retire to rest, when a messenger who had travelled with headlong speed from Prague, arrived at the Castle. He had quitted the capital in the evening of the 2d; and he brought word that the Baron of Altendorf, the Count of Rosenberg, and another noble whose name I forgot——'

'Oh! heed not the name,' cried the White Lady, now powerfully excited. What has occurred? what has happened to those noble——'

'They have been arrested by the Captain-General of the Taborites!' responded Hubert, in a tone which evinced his knowledge that he was proclaiming intelligence of a most painful character.

'Arrested!' exclaimed the White Lady, with a convulsive start. 'Then all our plans, all our designs are frustrated, Angela!' she added, in a voice of despair.

'Not so,' said Hubert hastily. 'On the contrary, 'tis more advisable than even at first that the young lady should repair to Prague.'

'I do not understand you, my good friend,' observed the Carmelite, who, as well as Angela herself, surveyed the old steward with mingled amazement and anxiety.

'One word is as good as twenty to explain my meaning,' resumed that functionary, speaking hastily but impressively. 'The mighty Zitzka is omnipotent at Prague; and he has imposed upon the three nobles whom he has placed in custody, certain conditions the failure to comply with which will cost them their lives! Let the young lady, then, hasten to Prague; let her exercise all her ingenuity with a view to effect the escape of those nobles; and who can tell but that she may become the heroine of as fine an episode as ever belonged to Bohemian history?'

'You are raving, Hubert!' exclaimed the White Lady, almost reduced to despair. 'What can a weak, defenceless, unfriended girl accomplish towards the unravelling of so tangled a web?'

'Girl!' cried Hubert, emphatically, although respectfully, 'she is a young woman of strong mind and excellent sense; and a presentiment inspires me with the conviction that she will achieve all she undertakes. But should she fail; and should matters reach that perilous crisis in which the headman's axe will be sharpened or the gibbet raised to wreak the vengeance of the Taborites upon the Baron of Altendorf, the Count of Rosenberg, and the Marquis of Schomberg, for this is the name which I had forgotten; then, all other means of saving them having been ineffectually tried, as a last resource, and *only* as a last resource, observe—she can deliver into the hands of Zitzka some unmistakeable token, or else a note containing a few hasty but impressive lines penned by you——'

'Ah! I comprehend you *now*, good Hubert,' said the White Lady, interrupting him with almost an expression of joyfulness in her tone. 'But that this suggestion should emanate from you—*you*, who are generally so timid and full of apprehension——'

'Hush! lady,' exclaimed the old steward; 'speak not an unnecessary word! There are lives to be saved,' he added, fixing his looks with a peculiar significancy upon the Carmelite; 'and saved they must be, even at the sacrifice of that secret which otherwise would be maintained to the end. But I have already declared that these means are only to be adopted as a last resource, and when every other project, device, or stratagem shall have failed. In a word, the expedient must be adopted when not another arrow is left in the quiver of Hope.'

'Yes, it shall be as you advise, honest Hubert!' said the White Lady.—'And now it remains for me to instruct this dear girl how to proceed,' she added, turning towards Angela.

'I have gathered enough, lady,' observed the maiden, who had listened in speechless amazement to this conversation, which so nearly though so mysteriously concerned herself, but whom circumstances had already so fully trained to place an illimitable and blind confidence in the Carmelite; 'I have gathered enough, lady, to make me aware that a grand and difficult task is about to be assigned to me; but I shall not shrink from undertaking it! For the incidents of this night have been so many, so varied, and so marvellous, that they appear as if forming the introduction to a new phase in my destiny; and I accept from Providence the lot which He may have marked out for me to pursue!'

'Spoken like a heroine!' exclaimed Hubert, his countenance lighting up with an unfeigned satisfaction.

'Or rather say like a noble-hearted, generous, and strong-minded woman,' observed the White Lady. 'Angela,' she continued, in a more solemn tone, 'you must lose no time in taking leave of your adopted parents and setting out for Prague. This steed is yours, and here is a purse of gold to bear your expenses. But remember, my dear child, that in explaining to Wildon and his wife the reasons which compel you to fly from the persecution of Lord Rodolp, you must speak of Hubert as the good friend who has assisted you this night to escape from the castle, and who has furnished you with the means of seeking safety in the far-off metropolis. To *me* you have sworn not to allude, and I am well assured that nothing will lead you to forfeit that solemn pledge. On reaching Prague, my dear Angela, you will have no easy task to enter upon. The lives of three nobles are to be saved, and heaven must prompt you how to act, I cannot! But should their fate appear inevitable,' added the White Lady, her tone now assuming so solemn and profound an earnestness, that the feelings of the maiden were even tensely strained as she listened; 'should all the plans which you may devise to effect their release prove ineffectual, then, as a last resource, seek an interview with John Zitzka, the captain-general of the Taborite army; throw yourself at his feet—show him this ring—and leave the rest to God!'

Thus speaking, the White Lady drew from her bosom a little velvet bag similar to that which Angela wore suspended to her own neck; and, drawing forth a plain ring set with a single diamond which glistened in the moonlight, she placed it upon the maiden's finger.

'And now one word more,' said the White Lady, in a tone which the unconquerable emotions that swelled within her rendered almost inaudible. 'Should it be necessary to seek the presence of the mighty Zitzka and invoke him by the magic influence of that ring to spare the lives of the nobles whose names have already met your ears, then, Angela, and only *then*, are you absolved from the oath which you ere now took regarding myself; and to every question that the Taborite chieftain shall put to you, may you respond frankly, truly, and unreservedly.'

'Your instructions, lady, shall be obeyed to the very letter,' exclaimed Angela, now considering herself to be entrusted with a mission the solemn character of which was enhanced by the profound mystery that enshrouded it.

'Farewell, then, dearest girl, farewell!' said the White Lady, straining the maiden to her bosom in an embrace of passionate fervor; then, suddenly tearing herself away, she plunged into the depths of the forest.

But as she thus precipitately retreated, her sobs were wafted on the wing of the breeze to the ears of Angela, adown whose cheeks the pearly tears were raining, for it seemed as if she had just parted with her best and dearest friend.

Hubert assisted her to mount the good steed which was pawing the ground impatiently; and still retaining the maiden's hand in his own for nearly a minute, he said in a voice tremulous

with emotion, 'May heaven prosper your mission, young lady! A dream which I had last night has impressed upon me the belief that you are destined to achieve marvellous things. It may be the delusion of an old man's brain, or it may be one of those transient revealings of the future which God sometimes vouchsafes, for His own wise and inscrutable purposes, even to the humblest of mortals! Time will prove whether my presentiment be well founded; and once again, dear young lady, do I invoke the blessings of all good angels upon thine head!'

Having uttered these words in an impressive though trembling tone, the old steward raised the maiden's hand with a species of paternal fervor to his lips, and then hurried abruptly away in the direction of Altendorf Castle.

Angela, whom rural habits and a forest life had rendered familiar with the management of a horse, urged her good steed into a smart canter; and, lighted by heaven's own silver lamp which shone so resplendently on high, she pursued in safety the path leading towards that cottage-home to which she was only returning for the purpose of bidding it farewell, perhaps for ever!

CHAPTER XXVII.

ENTHUSIASM.

A WEEK had elapsed since that eventful evening on which the Council of Nobles was so suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Zitzka; and once more do we find Sir Ernest de Colmar wending his way towards the palace gardens. Again is it at the witching hour when the twilight has given place to the argentine splendor of the moon; and again, also, does he repair thither to meet the Daughter of Satan.

On the terrace of the deserted building he paced up and down for a few minutes; presently a light step fell upon his ear—he turned abruptly—a figure was advancing towards him, and in a few moments he was by the side of Satania.

Oh! how his heart beat with thrilling rapture as he pressed her hand to his lips;—and in her eyes of such dark and dazzling splendor, those eyes lustrous as meteors and deep as the sea—pleasure appeared to dance, as she welcomed him with a smile that wreathed her rich red mouth and displayed the pearls shining in their coral setting.

She was attired precisely in the same manner as when they had last met; and if it were possible that a being so wondrously beautiful could appear more transcendently lovely at one time than at another, then was it on the present occasion that the dark glory of her charms shone with a power never equalled and never to be surpassed. The strongest minded man that intellect, virtue and valor ever raised towards the dignity of those Olympic demi-gods whom heathen mythology represents to have been originally of mortal mould, might have been pardoned indeed, if he sank at her feet to demand her pity and her love. Let this, then, be the excuse for Sir Ernest de Colmar, if, intoxicated in every sense by the influence of a beauty which would have thawed the coldness of an anchorite, he abandoned himself to all the fervor of that extatic joy which her presence excited in his soul.

'Adorable Satanais,' he exclaimed, still holding the hand which he had pressed so rapturously to his lips,—'I thank thee, oh! most sincerely thank thee, for the pleasure which this meeting affords. From the moment that I received the note in which you made the present appointment, I have counted the days and the hours with an impatience so feverish that the warm blood of shame has even rushed to my cheeks as I have reproached myself for my childishness. But wherefore have you suffered an entire week to elapse ere we met again? Do you not remember how we parted the night before that on which the council met?—and did it not strike you that I should remain a prey to the most torturing suspense until I saw you again.

'I do not possess sufficient vanity to enable me to suppose that aught regarding me could deeply interest your Excellency,' observed Satanais, with a certain degree of timidity and bashfulness in her tone and manner—but with a glance full of ineffable tenderness as she turned her eyes for an instant on the handsome countenance of the Austrian knight.

'Oh! it is cruel of you thus to speak,' he exclaimed, pressing her hand fervidly in his own: then gazing upon her splendid features with a rapture which he neither could nor sought to hide, he said in a lower and more touching tone, 'Have you forgotten Satanais, the con

versation which passed between us eight days ago, when we walked hand in hand along this same terrace, and lighted by a moon as lovely as that which now treads so softly and fairly in that zone of night's eternal gems? Do you not remember that we pledged to each other a lasting friendship—and tha, I vowed to become your champion, your vindicator, and your defender in any emergency which the vicissitudes of this life might raise up in your path?'

'Yes—all this has been treasured up in my memory,' answered Satanais, in a tone full of melting softness,—'and never can be obliterated. In that oriental clime which gave me birth, there are tales and legends of palaces shut up for a thousand years, and cities where the inhabitants have been turned to stone as a punishment for their crimes; but when the palaces have been entered again and the spell-bound people have awakened to life once more at the expiration of centuries, it has been found that Time has passed harmlessly over them, leaving the flowers unfaded and the jewels undimmed. Thus it is with my memory. Years may pass over it, but the rose of friendship which you have planted there, will remain unwithered, and the gems of chivalrous sentiment with which you have decked it, will shine on in unimpaired lustre to the end.'

'Oh! beauteous and mysterious creature,' exclaimed De Colmar, 'how captivating is thy language, how enchanting thy words! Sunny and glowing as the land of thy birth, thy thoughts are all fervour and romance, and the golden richness of thy voice flows upon my ears like a harmony which no sound on earth can imitate.'

'It is dangerous to listen to thy flattering tongue,' murmured Satanais, and the knight felt her hand tremble in his own.

'I mean no flattery,' he responded, in an impassioned tone, 'for he who flatters speaks not the truth, and there is guile upon his lips. For myself, I scorn a falsehood, Satanais—and when I praise thee, 'tis because thou art adorable beyond all earthly beings. But there are many things that I seek to know concerning thee, and thou hast much to reveal to my ears.'

'Ah!' ejaculated Satanais, with a slight start; and, throwing a rapid look around, she observed, 'You would fain remind me of that promise which I gave when last we met—a promise that I would breathe to your ears the legend of mystery and horror which contains the narrative of my birth. Oh! my dear friend,' she cried, in a tone that seemed stricken with a sudden anguish, 'it is a history so painful—a tale, the mere recital of which is calculated to arouse feelings of such poignant grief in my soul, that had you not established the strongest claims on my confidence, I could never induce my lips to frame the words which it will still cost me so vast an effort to utter.'

'It rends my soul to think that the narrative which I seek from your tongue can distress you thus profoundly, Satanais,' said the knight; 'but I call heaven to witness that I am prompted by no idle and impertinent curiosity.—When last we met, and when you were about to enter on the mysterious recital, you declared that I might assist you with my advice, my counsel. Sincerely, oh! most sincerely, do I hope that such may prove the case. For there is no task which your narrative can suggest, no claim which your misfortunes or griefs can establish upon my friendship, that will not meet with prompt attention at my hands. Yes, by heaven!' he exclaimed, with passionate vehemence, as all the incidents of the former night of meeting crowded in upon his memory; 'were Satan himself to start up as your enemy, he should find a foe in me!'

'Merciful God!' cried the splendid creature, clinging convulsively to his arm, 'you know not what you say!'

'Full well do I comprehend the meaning of my own words,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, sustaining Satanais in his arms, for she trembled from head to foot as if about to fall upon the pavement of the terrace; 'and now am I more than ever convinced that there is a deeper significancy in thy name than I at first supposed.'

'There is—O heaven! there is indeed!' murmured Satanais, reclining her glorious head upon his shoulder, so that her glossy hair touched, and her fragrant breath fanned his cheek. 'But I am to be pitied, and not blamed,' she continued, in a voice that was low, pathetic, and tremulously mournful; 'the rashness—for I will not call it crime—of my royal father ——'

'Tell me this dreadful narrative, Satanais,' interrupted Sir Ernest de Colmar, tortured by suspense to an extreme that became intolerable; 'and I

vow, by the moon that smiles upon us and by the heaven which is above us, by them I vow that if you have wrongs to redress, I will become your champion—aye, even though the awful mystery which now envelopes thee be connected with the powers of hell itself.'

'Again I tell you, Ernest, that you know not what you say!' cried Satanais, now throwing her arms about his neck, and clinging to him, not with the fervor of passion, but as if to protect him against some evil influence, which she could perceive, but which was invisible to him.

'Adorable creature!' he exclaimed, pressing his lips to her dark but smooth and polished forehead; 'there is no sacrifice that I would not make, no danger that I would not incur, for your sake.'

'Then listen to my tale of mystery and horror,' she said, suddenly disengaging herself from his embrace, and throwing upon him a look that flashed with indescribable gratitude, tenderness and love. 'But prepare to hear a narrative that will make your hair stand on end, and the blood curdle in your veins.'

The beautiful creature paused for a few moments, and they walked slowly along the moonlit terrace. At length, having cast a rapid glance around, and holding the hand of De Colmar somewhat tighter, she commenced her history in a slow, measured, and solemn tone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HISTORY OF SATANAIS.

'Far, far away in that oriental clime which seems like a rich domain belonging to the palace of the Sun, there was a kingdom where the lavish hand of Nature and the ingenuity of Man had accumulated every element of luxury, grandeur, and magnificence. The mighty cities swarmed with inhabitants remarkable for beauty and wisdom; the sons of that region were tall and dignified as gods, the daughters lovely and enchanting as houris. The domes of the palaces and the pinnacles of the temples were sheathed with burnished gold; in the public squares crystal fountains played and leapt in vast basins of solid silver; and the shrines and altars gleamed with countless gems. Poverty was unknown in that delicious land, where the golden harvests yielded their crop to the sickle twice a year, and the choicest fruits sprang forth spontaneously from the fertile soil. In no other region upon the earth did vegetable nature array herself in a more gorgeous garniture; flowers of all hues embroidered the fields and filled the air with perfume; and in the emerald groves the yellow orange, the glowing pomegranate, the purple grape, and the vermeil peach, gleamed in such abundance that it appeared as if gems had been showered amidst the trees to form the fruitage of every bough. The almond bowers, scattered by the passing breath of the gentle zephyr, lent a delicious fragrance to the atmosphere of the cities; and in the gardens where clustering acacias formed refreshing bowers, the bird of love was wont to sing throughout the livelong day.

'The King of this lovely land was named Ildirim, which means '*The Lightning*.' From the moment of his birth until the eighteenth year of his age, he had been kept a close prisoner, according to usage, in the royal palace; his ideas of the great busy world being thus limited to the instruction which he received from his tutors, and his acquaintance with the charms of nature being circumscribed to the gardens in which he was permitted to ramble at stated hours, and to the pleasure-grounds where he indulged in equestrian exercise. Thus, when the Ministers, Grandees, and High Dignitaries of the Kingdom one day appeared in his presence, prostrated themselves at his feet, and informed him that, as his father had just breathed his last, he was now lord and ruler of that fair realm, the youth felt as if he were entering upon a new existence in another and a different sphere. Clothed in the richest robes, he took his seat upon the throne, while the palace resounded with acclamations that were caught up by the multitudes assembled outside; and thence the thrilling cries spread, with increasing enthusiasm, unto the remotest corners of the sovereign city. Thus was Ildirim proclaimed King at the tender age of eighteen.

'Leaving the administration of affairs to the Ministers whom he found in office, the new monarch immediately abandoned himself to a career of luxury and dissipation. He appeared determined, now that he was his own master, to indemnify himself for the years of restraint, frugality, and innocence which he had hitherto passed; and in this disposition he was encour-

aged by the Ministers themselves. For these unprincipled and selfish men, studying only their peculiar aggrandizement, were well pleased to serve a monarch who placed such illimitable confidence in their integrity, and who became too deeply immersed in pleasure to trouble himself with their proceedings. Lulled into perfect security by their specious representations, the inexperienced and credulous Ildirim banished from his mind all the cares of his regal position, and plunged headlong into the vortex of sensual enjoyments.

'A more god-like youth, in personal appearance, never breathed the air of this world. Tall in stature and nobly formed, like a dark cloud passing before the sunlight was the stately figure of Ildirim. His hair was coal-black, long, and glossy; his eyes were large, dark, and brilliant. His countenance was handsome and lofty; and a smile of superb haughtiness was stamped upon his lip. Possessed of a beauty so closely allied to sublimity, deplorable was it that Ildirim the King should have at once and all in a moment degenerated into the sensualist and the voluptuary

'Two years passed away; and the people began to murmur against the government. They said, 'Why is not Ildirim like his father, who was wont to watch over our interests and protect us against the oppression of the powerful?—why does not our King appear amongst us, to bless us with the light of his countenance?—wherefore does he place a blind and unlimited confidence in men who are deceiving *him* and tyrannising over *us?* But the voice of popular remonstrance penetrated not through the walls of the palace; and the Ministers were constantly assuring the King that his subjects were as contented, as prosperous, and as tranquil as ever.

'Now it happened that Mansour, the Sovereign of an adjacent country, hearing of the disaffection which was gaining ground in Ildirim's territory, the possession of which he had long coveted, fancied it to be a favorable opportunity to carry his cherished aim into execution. Collecting, therefore, a mighty army, the ambitious Mansour invaded the realms of King Ildirim, proclaiming to the people that he came to release them from the tyranny of despotic Ministers and the sway of a contemptible debauchee. But Ildirim's subjects, though displeased with their monarch, were not prepared to receive s foreign yoke; and great numbers flying to arms at the call of the Prime Minister, Kara Ali, they marched against the invaders. A terrible battle was fought on the confines of the kingdom, and victory decided in favor of Mansour. Kara Ali's army was annihilated; and that Minister with difficulty saved himself and a few faithful adherents by a precipitate flight from the field of his disgrace and defeat.

'When the news of this misfortune reached the capital, the inhabitants were filled with dismay; and their apprehensions rose to despair on the arrival of intelligence to the effect that Mansour was marching at the head of his victorious troops to beseige the sovereign city. These tidings were confirmed by Kara Ali and his fugitive followers: and now was it for the first time that Ildirim became aware of the tremendous danger which threatened himself and his people. For hitherto the subordinate Ministers had kept him in entire ignorance of the invasion; and they had devised some excuse to account for the temporary absence of their chief, Kara Ali. But at length, when the popular terror and indignation were rising to a menacing height, the Ministers broke the fatal news to their Sovereign; and Ildirim was thus aroused as it were by the voice of the thunder-storm from the lethargy of voluptuousness in which he had been dreaming away the first two years of his reign. He awoke from the trance of dissipation and luxury, to find his armies annihilated—his subjects ready to rise in rebellion against him—and a victorious enemy within two days' march of his capital!

'Springing from the couch of pleasure,—scattering to the winds the chaplet of roses with which Beauty's hand had crowned his brow,—and dashing aside the golden goblet of sparkling wine which a houri presented him on bended knee, Ildirim suddenly displayed an energy equal to the pressing emergency that had thus aroused him. Dismissing his band of musicians, his troops of dancing girls, his harem of countless beauties, his boon companions, his sycophants and courtiers, he assumed the war-turban, girt on his scimitar, mounted his horse, and rode forth into the midst of the city. His presence electrified the inhabitants: they gathered around him, greeted him with enthusiastic acclaims, and vowed to die

in defence of their homes and children. Ordering Kara Ali and the other ministers to be thrown into prison, Ildirim at once adopted energetic means for the defence of the city. He armed all the male adult population; and without waiting until the invaders had brought fire and sword into the suburban villages, he marched forth at the head of a strong band to intercept their progress.

'A sanguinary conflict took place within a few leagues of the capital. The combat began at sunrise, and the fertile plains were soon covered with the dead and dying. The rivulets, blushing at man's ferocity, flowed with a crimson tide; and the hues of the richest peony were excelled by the purple blood that deluged the fairest gardens, and carried the traces of slaughter amidst the parterres of flowers.—The sun glowed like a ball of fire in the over-arching canopy of spotless azure; and its sultry rays beat maddeningly upon the toiling combatants. Noon came and passed, and still the fight raged on. Havoc and destruction knew no pause; death and desolation sought no interval of rest. And foremost in the ranks of battle was Ildirim the king, performing prodigies of valor; now encouraging his troops to storm some strong position—then leading an attack against the serried phalanx of the enemy; now thundering through the plain at the head of his chosen guard of horse—then climbing an ascent, amidst showers of galling arrows, to dislodge a detachment of the invading army. But scarcely was an advantage gained when Mansour poured fresh troops upon Ildirim's gallant band; like showers of countless locusts did the enemy's cohorts spring from the neighboring woods, and crowd down from the adjacent heights; and when the orb of day was swathing the western horizon in purple, and orange, and crimson, and gold, the beams of that glorious sunset played upon the broken lines and shattered ranks of Ildirim's retreating force!

'Yes, the youthful king saw his army routed in every quarter, and flying in all directions; but, determined to perish rather than carry into the capital the tidings of his own disgrace and his country's ruin, he threw himself from his horse, fell wearied and stricken with grief at the foot of a tree, and resolved to wait there until the invaders should come up and put him to death. Vainly did the few retainers who accompanied him—vainly, I say, did they implore him to save his life by flight. He commanded them to leave him to his fate, and they departed, their souls full of sorrow and bitterness. Then, finding himself alone, the unhappy Ildirim gave free vent to the anguish which was rending his heart; and, beating his breast and tearing his hair, he burst forth into the most passionate lamentations.

'"Oh! this is heaven's judgment upon me for my crimes!" he exclaimed, in a piercing tone. "Two years of dissipation and folly are to be expiated by the defeat and ruin which have accumulated in a few hours, and which will presently be crowned with death! Insensate wretch that I have been! miserable outcast from heaven's favor that I am! Oh! to retrieve the fortunes of this terrible day—to convert defeat into victory—to change disgrace into triumph! Almighty God, is it impossible to do all this? or wilt thou suffer me to perish in shame and infamy, and leave the once adoring millions to curse and abhor my memory? Yes, thou Eternal Power!" he cried in a frantic tone, extending his arms wildly towards heaven at the same time: "thee I invoke to succor me in this hour of my bitter anguish, thine aid I implore to turn back the tide of invasion which now rolls on towards my defenceless capital! Alas, alas! no miracle is vouchsafed—my prayers remain unheard. *God* has abandoned me," screamed forth the wretched king, "and in my despair do I call upon thee, *O Satan!*"

'The words thus uttered with frenzied tone and maniac gesture were still ringing in the air, when Ildirim felt a heavy hand laid suddenly upon his shoulder, as he knelt in the anguish of his soul at the foot of the tree. Casting up his looks, he beheld a tall dark form standing by his side; and the eyes which shone forth from the swarthy countenance that was bending over him, appeared to gleam with subdued lightnings. The sun had set by this time, and a deep obscurity had fallen upon the battle-field; but the face of this being, irradiated with the glow of its own baleful eyes, was plainly visible; and the features would have been beautiful had they not been terrible. A strange, profound, and mysterious feeling smote the soul of Ildirim the king, as he gazed upon this awful form; and, remembering the last words that had fallen from his lips, he shuddered with a cold and violent convulsion, for a sudden intu-

ition, springing up in his mind, made him aware that his invocation had been heard, and that the Prince of Darkness was standing by his side!

'"Thou didst call upon Satan to aid thee," said a deep sonorous voice, sounding like the subdued murmur of a mighty torrent in Ildirim's ears, or like an echo from a profound cavern; "and Satan hath not been deaf to thy prayer. Speak, and delay not; for, behold! Mansour and his host are approaching with the fury of a whirlwind and the force of a torrent."

'And as he thus spoke, a hazy species of twilight slowly suffused itself around; and by means of the partial glow, Ildirim could perceive the legions of the conqueror advancing at a rapid rate.'

'"Save me from death and dishonor, O Satan!" exclaimed the young King, driven to desperation, "save my people from destruction and my territory from the invaders! Do this, and I will worship thee—thine image shall be set up in all our temples——"

'"Peace, silly mortal!" interrupted the Prince of Darkness. "I reck not for such adulation as that whereof thou speakest!"

'"Then name thy terms, delay not!" cried Ildirim, his anxiety rising to a poignancy of the most torturing description. "See, the invaders are approaching——"

'"Listen, O mortal!" said the Demon, his sonorous voice rolling like distant thunder upon the ears of the youthful King. 'Swear to devote thy first born child to me; and in less than an hour thine enemies shall be scattered like chaff before the wind. Hesitate for another moment, and thou art lost!'

'"I swear!" exclaimed the infatuated, maddened, frenzied Ildirim; then, shrinking appalled from the terrible vow which he had pledged, he would have recanted,—he would have recalled the tremendous oath; but it was too late! For Satan, seizing him in his arms, transported him in a moment to the gate of the city, through which his fugitive troops were hurrying headlong. Then, obedient to the inspiration which he received from his infernal prompter who remained unseen to all but Ildirim, the young King raised his voice and commanded the flying soldiers to rally around him. The mandate was obeyed in an instant; fresh courage animated the fugitives,—and they received with acclaim the exhortation that urged them to tempt one more blow ere they yielded up the city to the invaders. The battle was accordingly renewed beneath the very walls of the capital; and the Prince of Darkness fought by the side of Ildirim. Vainly did Mansour struggle against the unknown but irresistible influence which so suddenly and mysteriously favored the forces of Ildirim; the fortune of the war was completely turned, and the combat of a single hour on this memorable night retrieved all the adversities of the day. Mansour's army was thrown into confusion,—and the slaughter was prodigious. Everywhere, by the light of the lovely moon which had now risen, was the scimitar of Ildirim seen cutting its way amidst the invaders. Inspired by this example, and animated with a strength and a courage which seemed to come from an unknown source and which surprised themselves, the troops so lately flying in disorder now bore down all before them; *and within the hour Mansour's host was scattered like chaff upon the wind!*

'It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm which welcomed Ildirim's entry into his capital after this glorious achievement. Every house was illuminated; and the whole population gathered in the streets to pay their tribute of gratitude and praise to the youthful hero who alone obtained the credit of that great victory. Intoxicated with the plaudits lavished upon him and with the adulation of which he had thus become the object, Ildirim forgot how much of his triumph was owing to the Enemy of Mankind, and at how terrible a sacrifice he had purchased his conquest. For Satan had disappeared from his side at the moment when the rout of the invaders was accomplished; and even when the young King had returned to his palace and had sought the solitude of his own chamber, he looked upon his interview and compact with the Prince of Darkness as the offspring of a fancy terribly fevered and disordered at the time.

'Peace was then restored in Ildirim's dominions; and the immense booty resulting from the overthrow of Mansour's host furnished a complete indemnification for the cost of the war. Kara Ali and the other ministers were banished from the kingdom; and the youthful monarch called honest statesmen to his councils. The people were delighted with the conduct of their Sovereign; and the country was soon blest with a

greater amount of prosperity than it had ever known even in the best days of the preceding reign. Thus two years passed away; and during that interval not a single act or deed on Ildirim's part impaired the golden opinions which he had so deservedly and so universally won.

'At length the people began to marvel wherefore their much-loved monarch remained unmarried; and they said, "Let our worshipped Ildirim choose himself a wife from amongst the princesses of the neighboring States, in order that such an union may not only strengthen his alliance with some powerful country, but likewise give an heir to the throne of these realms."—The ministers from time to time reported these sayings to the king; but he invariably turned the conversation to some other topic. For although he had succeeded in persuading himself that his agreement with Satan was nothing more than a delusion, yet the idea of marriage nevertheless filled him with a secret terror; and he accordingly silenced his councillors as well as he was able, whenever they addressed him upon the subject. But his people, who were notorious throughout the nations of the East for the pertinacity with which they were wont to pursue particular ideas, soon began to dwell more fixedly upon the proposal for the king's marriage; and, at length, the ministers were forced to address Ildirim with solemn seriousness upon the subject.—Finding the king deaf to their representations, they adopted a new line of policy They despatched the most celebrated artists to the Courts of the adjacent countries, with instructions to paint the portraits of the most beautiful princesses; and when this project had been fully carried out, the pictures were all despatched to the house of the Prime Minister, who had a magnificent gallery built for their reception. This high dignitary then presented himself to Ildirim, and besought his Majesty to accept of an entertainment at his abode. The king assented; and on the day named he proceeded in great state to his Prime Minister's palace. The banquet was attended by all the nobles of the Court; and the choicest delicacies which the three continents of the world could produce appeared upon the board. When the repast was terminated and the company were engaged in conversation, the Prime Minister dexterously turned the discourse upon the subject of pictures; and one of the subordinate officials, who had previously received the necessary hint, immediately said, "Your highness may assuredly boast of possessing the finest gallery of portraits in the whole country."

"Ildirim's curiosity was piqued; and he desired to inspect the much-vaunted collection. His Highness the Prime Minister, inwardly rejoicing at the circumstance and anticipating the best results, accordingly led the way to the gallery, where the king was perfectly ravished by the variety of charms which the portraits presented to his view. It was a gallery of beauty that amazed and dazzled him. But having carefully examined them all, his eyes settled with renewed pleasure on one portrait that had already, during the first inspection, excited the softest and tenderest emotions in his heart. This picture represented a charming young creature with sunny hair, a complexion of milk and roses, glowing lips, and a throat of snow. Her eyes, soft as those of the gazelle, were of velvet blackness; thus contrasting singularly but beautifully with that flood of golden hair which appeared to reflect the beams of the orb of day. An undefinable charm and grace characterised the features of this princess; and, unable to conceal, much less subdue his rapture, Ildirim exclaimed, 'Ah! my dear friend, if the world contained a beauty like that which is represented in this picture, you would not be compelled to urge and persuade me in respect to marriage!"

'"Your Majesty will therefore be gratified," said the Prime Minister, "to learn that the original of the portrait which pleases you is not only in existence at this present moment, but within twenty days' journey of your Majesty's dominion."

'"God be thanked!" ejaculated Ildirim, already deep in love with the fair being whose portrait had thus ravished his soul.

'"Yes," continued the Prime Minister; "it is as I have informed your Majesty, for that picture represents the Princess Almeria, the youngest and loveliest daughter of the King of Georgia."

'"Alas!" exclaimed Ildirim, heaving a profound sigh; "then all my hopes are destroyed the instant that they have budded into existence! For am not I the sovereign of a nation worshipping

the God of Mahomet? and is not the King of Georgia a Christian?"

'"Nevertheless, my liege," returned the Prime Minister, "I will undertake that your majesty's subjects shall be well satisfied with the choice that you have made."

'Ildirim embraced his faithful friend and administrator in token of his gratitude and delight at the assurance thus given; and the very next morning ambassadors were sent to the court of Georgia to demand the hand of the Princess Almeria for the king. The news spread like wildfire throughout the capital, and thence in a short space to the remotest corners of Ildirim's dominions; and the people were everywhere rejoiced. They considered the intention of their monarch to take a wife as a concession made to their wishes; and they therefore treated with indifference the fact that the object of his choice belonged to the sect of Giaours, or Christians. Meanwhile Ildirim counted with impatience the days that elapsed until the return of his ambassadors; and so completely absorbed was he in the new dreams of happiness which were thus opened to his contemplation, that he forgot every thing relative to the compact with Satan.

'In due time the envoys returned from their mission, bearing the welcome intelligence that the King of Georgia had acceded to their request, and that the Princess Almeria, who was as beautiful as the portrait represented her, was highly flattered by the preference which so great and powerful a monarch as Ildirim had shown her. These tidings diffused the utmost joy throughout the capital; and Ildirim lost no time in despatching his Prime Minister, attended with a splendid retinue, to the Georgian court, in order to fetch away his intended bride, and escort her with due honors to the capital of his own dominions. Again did he count the weeks and days with impatience, until at length express-couriers arrived to announce that the procession was within a few leagues of the city. Then Ildirim, attended by his whole court, went forth to receive the Princess Almeria: and if the portrait had already filled his soul with rapture, the living original seemed endowed with a loveliness transcending aught that his imagination had ever depicted in the hour of its sunniest enthusiasm. On her side the princess was evidently well pleased with the appearance, manners, and conversation of her intended husband; and under auspices that seemed so favorable the procession entered the city amidst the acclamations of the joyous multitudes.

'On the following day the marriage was celebrated with great pomp. An Armenian priest, named Heraclius, had accompanied the suite of the Princess Almeria; and, in order to satisfy her religious scruples, the matrimonial rites were celebrated not only in accordance with the Mussulman creed, but likewise in conformity with the Christian tenets, Father Heraclius officiating on the latter occasion. In the evening the city was illuminated, the fountains ran with wine, and, indeed, the public rejoicings were maintained for several days.

'Weeks passed on, four months had elapsed since the marriage of the royal pair; and Queen Almeria communicated to her husband the intelligence that she was in a way to become a mother. Ildirim's first sentiment was one of ineffable joy; but at the next moment a cold shudder passed over his entire frame; a thought struck him with the searing, blasting effect of lightning, and his brain appeared to be suddenly scorched and withered. By a tremendous effort he concealed his emotions from the eyes of his beloved Almeria; and, hastily quitting her upon some pretext, he sought the solitude of a shady bower in the garden, in order to compose his agitated mind. But scarcely had he seated himself in that fragrant arbor of roses and acacias, when he became aware that a tall dark form was standing by his side; and a crowd of horrors fastened like ravenous vultures upon his brain. For those features, so awful in their beauty, so terrible in their sublimity, were as indelibly impressed on his memory as if he had been in the habit of seeing them daily and hourly for years; and now he could no longer cheat himself into the belief that his compact was a delusion. No, he awoke, as it were, to the consciousness of a truth so tremendous that it froze his blood with dread horror; for some minutes he sate, wildly glaring up at the Prince of Darkness, whose countenance was bent fixedly upon him; and then, a mortal shivering seizing upon him, he fell half dead, his trembling frame lying at the Demon's feet, bowed and powerless beneath the appalling gaze that seemed to blast him with flashes of vivid lightning.

'"In a few months hence," said Satan, in that deep sonorous voice which

came upon the ear like the sound of the ocean passing through a long vaulted cavern,—"in a few months hence you will become a father, and I shall then return to claim mine own."

'"Mercy! mercy!" cried the tortured, anguished, horror-stricken Ildirim, writhing as if in mortal agony at the feet of the Prince of Darkness.

'"Mercy! Who appeals to *me* for mercy?" demanded the arch-fiend, in a tone where withering sarcasm, vengeful bitterness, and infernal triumph were awfully commingled. "As well may the wretch who is screaming and struggling in the coils of a monstrous serpent, implore mercy from the reptile as it extends its elastic jaws and protrudes its venomed tongue preparatory to the enjoyment of its hideous banquet! As well may the mariner when tossing and battling in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of the Maelstroom, beseech the surging billows to spare him for his wife and children's sake and waft him back in safety to his far-off home! As well may the victim of gross superstition and ecclesiastical cruelty, implore his torturers to release him from the stake on which he is impaled, or from the pyre which has begun to lick his writhing limbs with its tongues of flame! No—miserable mortal that thou art!—'tis not to *me* that thou canst appeal for mercy! The compact exists—thine oath is registered in hell; and at the moment of its birth, shall I come to demand thy first-born child!"

'"Is it possible!" murmured the almost heart-broken Ildirim, unable to believe that so appalling a calamity could possibly be in store for him. "No, no, I am dreaming—'tis a hideous night-mare—a terrible vision—a dream made up of excruciating horrors——"

'"Fool!" ejaculated the King of Darkness, in a tone of such withering scorn that it startled the goaded, maddened Ildirim with as keen a paroxysm of pain as if a fiery arrow had suddenly shot through his heart without taking away his life; "wilt thou still endeavor to cheat thyself into that belief? wilt thou persist in tutoring thy recreant soul to look upon the lie until it assumes the aspect of a welcome truth? Then must I teach thee to regard our compact as a stern reality, and not as an idle dream!"

'And, as his scornful lips gave utterance to these last words, the arch-fiend abruptly seized the king's right wrist and held it for a single moment in his grasp. A single moment!—yes; but the anguish of whole centuries was concentrated therein—and a shriek of mortal agony burst from the maddened Ildirim; for it seemed as if his wrist were held in a vice of red hot iron!

'A mocking laugh of infernal triumph rang in his ears, and he heard and saw no more; for his senses abandoned him!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF SATANAIS.

'When Ildirim the King awoke to consciousness again, it was with a sudden and convulsive start, as if the revival of memory and the resuscitation of intelligence were accompanied by a poignant pang. Wildly he cast around his eyes, with the evident dread of encountering some terrible object: but he was in a moment relieved of a crushing apprehension when he found himself reclining in the arms of his lovely Almeria. Over him bent her angelic countenance, every feature of which expressed the deepest, tenderest solicitude; and the tears that gleamed pearl-like on her long lashes showed how acutely she must have suffered on finding her worshipped husband stretched senseless in that arbor. But now a smile played on her lips, like the sun beams shining forth in the midst of the showers of Spring; and, lavishing the tenderest caresses upon Ildirim, she besought him to reveal to her the cause of what had happened. Her affectionate manner and her soothing words poured the balm of consolation so effectually into his wounded spirit, that he became absorbed in the soft abstractions and tender endearments of love; and while thus appreciating more profoundly than ever how bright and precious a gem was the heart of his Almeria, a flood of so much happiness rushed in unto his soul, that he could not believe himself to be so unblest as to have really made a compact with Satan. No; he felt convinced that it was a dream; and, thus yielding to the infatuation of his ideas regarding it, he thought to unburthen his mind altogether by revealing those impressions to the ear of his queen.

'"Upwards of three years have elapsed, my well-beloved Almeria," he said, "since my dominions were invaded by King Mansour, who, having defeated the first army sent out to oppose him, advanced upon the capital. I gathered all my available forces, and went forth to meet the enemy. From morning until evening lasted the battle; and the setting sun saw my troops flying confusedly from overwhelming numbers. Separating myself from them, I sank down in despair at the foot of a tree, awaiting death as the only relief from shame, dishonor, and a nation's wrath. The dreadful fatigues which I had endured throughout the day and the apparently irreparable ruin which had burst upon my devoted head, crushed me down to the very dust; and a stunning sensation—a kind of palsy of the heart and brain—wrapt me as it were in a trance. But my morbid fancy awoke into feverish activity; and I dreamt a waking dream—a dream so terrible that you will scarcely wonder if it should have since haunted me from time to time. For methought that the Enemy of Mankind appeared, and availing himself of the utter prostration of my fortunes, tempted me with an offer too dazzling to refuse, but involving a condition too frightful to breathe, beloved Almeria, in your ears."

'"Oh! tell me all, dearest Ildirim!" said the queen. "Let me know the extent of your sufferings, that I may impart the full measure of consolation."

'"Be it so, my well beloved," continued Ildirim, yielding to her demand. "Methought, then, that Satan proposed to raise me up from despair—to place me upon the pinnacle of a conqueror—and to scatter Mansour's host like chaff before the wind, on condition that I would devote my first-born child to *him!*"

'"O Ildirim! this is terrible," exclaimed Almeria, pressing closer to her husband and casting around looks of affright. "But you are certain that it was a dream?" she cried, those anguished and unquiet glances settling upon his countenance.

'"Beyond all doubt it was a dream," responded Ildirim, in a tone so completely re-assuring that Almeria was convinced and tranquillized. "Methought, however," he continued, "that I assented to the proposal thus insidiously made by Satan: but it must have been that, acting under the influence of my fevered fancy, impelled by the instinct of despair, I started from that trance-like numbness which had held me powerless and prostrate at the foot of the tree, and rushing after my fugitive troops, the courage with which desperation armed me was caught by them. They listened to my voice—I remember calling them to rally—I recollect appealing to them for the sake of their wives and children, to turn and strike another blow ere they abandoned their homes and all they held dear to the enemy. Nor did I call upon them in vain; they rallied around me, the combat was renewed, and in hour the invading army lay scattered and strewn But all this was natural enough, Almeria: the sudden resuscitation of energies for a moment crushed, this was the retrieving influence, and there was nought supernatural therein. Nevertheless, from time to time, during the three years which have elapsed since that memorable period, the thought has haunted me that such an infernal compact was possible, that it might have taken place—"

'"No—Oh! no," interrupted Almeria, unable however to cast off the cold shudder which crept slowly—slowly—slowly over her entire form, like a chill and clammy snake coiling itself by degrees around her from head to foot. "It is impossible that heaven could permit such an appalling temptation, much less so tremendous a sacrifice as that to which it would seem to lead. You have rightly accounted for it all, my beloved husband: 'twas your fevered imagination which engendered a supernatural idea, and that idea inspired the energy which consummated the natural events that followed."

'"Such must indeed be the true reading of the mystery," said Ildirim. "But now I come to the event of this day, Almeria; and you can readily comprehend that when your lips ere now breathed in my ears the intelligence that our love would in due time be blessed by offspring, the tidings, at first so welcome, were the next moment turned into the knell of despair and death by the startling reminiscence of the compact with Satan. I broke away from thy presence—I hurried hither—and then my imagination, fevered and disordered again, showed me a new phase of the awful dream which commenced three years ago. Methought that Satan re-appeared—that he stood by my side—that he reminded me of the compact—that I implored him to

have mercy upon me; but that he responded with bitter taunts and cruel irony——"

'"And you fainted under the influence of the hideous waking-dream?" said Almeria, the cold shudder which again shook her own form from head to foot imparting itself to the frame of her husband as he lay half-reclining in her arms.

'"Yes, I fainted," he replied, dread horror now convulsing him as his recollection of the closing scene of his interview with Satan became suddenly vivid and blasting. "But—oh! what reminiscence is this that shoots athwart my brain? Did he not reproach me for believing it to be a dream? Almighty God—it cannot be—no—no—'tis still a dream! And yet there was something that he did to me——Ah! I remember—he seized my wrist—he held it for an instant in his iron gripe——O horror! what do I behold?———It is *not* a dream!"

'And the wretched king, who had bared his right wrist as he gave passionate and vehement utterance to these last broken sentences, fell all quivering and trembling at the feet of his young and lovely wife, from whose lips had burst a wild and thrilling cry as her startled glance recoiled from her husband's arm. For on that arm there was a deep black mark, circling the wrist, and appearing to have been burnt into the flesh with red hot iron; and this was the sign which Satan had imprinted there, to show that the compact was a stern reality and not an idle dream!

'Oh! how can I find words to depict the anguish and despair into which the youthful king and his still younger queen were thrown, when these overwhelming convictions burst upon them? Down—down to the very earth were they crushed, that handsome young man and that lovely descendant of a race of houris!—their hands were clenched—the cold perspiration stood upon their brows; and their breath was now held tightly as if screams were passing behind. There was a long—a dead—an appalling silence, during which their looks were averted from each other; then their gaze, full of unimaginable horror, met; and, bursting into an agony of tears, they fell into each other's arms.

'But I must draw a veil over this portion of my narrative; indeed, no words can do justice to it. Suffice it to say that several hours passed, during which the stricken pair remained in that arbour, preserving long intervals of silence, and then speaking in low and hoarse whispers. At length, when the orb of day had sunk down in all the pomp and grandeur of its occidental path, they came forth from the bower. Yes,—hand in hand they came forth, with downcast looks and agitated steps; and, entered the palace, they shut themselves up in a chamber, to which Heraclius was presently summoned.—Thither the venerable Armenian priest accordingly repaired; and to his ears was revealed the tale of desolation and horror which the king and queen had to tell. The old man listened with a kind of stupor to the appalling narrative; but when it was completed, his eyes fell with an expression of boundless sympathy and illimitable compassion upon the charming and unhappy Almeria.

'"Although myself a votary of the Mahometan creed," said Ildirim, at the close of his story, "yet have I yielded to the entreaties of my well-beloved, and imparted my tremendous secret to thee, who art a Christian. But Almeria assures me that thou art wiser than most of thy fellow-men, and that thou art acquainted with many things not commonly known to the world. If, therefore, thou canst assist us, reverend father, in this cruel difficulty, thy reward shall be whatever thou may'st claim and I can grant."

'"Though thou art a Mahometan, O king," replied Heraclius, "yet dost thou worship one God; and therein thou resemblest the Christian; and the God of the one is the God of the other. To this Almighty Being, then, must we address ourselves for aid and succour," continued the old man solemnly, "and He will not desert us."

'Having thus spoken, Heraclius knelt down and prayed aloud. The king and queen likewise fell upon their knees—and prayed with him; and at the expiration of half an hour they arose, comforted in spirit.

'"Our intercessions have not proved unavailing," said the pious Armenian priest, after a long pause, and now speaking with even a more solemn seriousness than before, "for it appears as if a secret and mysterious inspiration prompts me what counsel to give and how the awful calamity can be averted."

'The young king and the still more youthful queen took the old man's

hands and pressed them with grateful fervor to their lips: then, fixing their eyes upon his countenance, they awaited in trembling suspense until he should explain the meaning of the words which he had uttered and the hopes which he had given.

'"My dear children," he at length said, "for as children are ye, with regard to me, in age and in experience, and the misfortune which menaces your happiness, endears you to me by all the ties of sympathy and compassion, listen well to the words which I am about to speak. The first-born child of your marriage has been vowed to Satan, and Satan will not forget to claim his victim; for, alas! long even before it was conceived by its mother, has the coming babe been doomed to rank amongst the Children of Darkness. But the same paternal oath which thus foredoomed it, may now dedicate that child to God; and, inasmuch as it will thereby become one of the Children of Light even before its birth, the service of heaven will claim preference to that of hell. In this manner will the machinations of the Evil One be defeated, and the child saved from the appalling destiny unto which it is at present devoted. Hearken, then, O Ildirim! while I speak more plainly still: for your queen already comprehends me clearly. I mean that if you wish to rescue your first-born from the power of Satan, you must dedicate it to the service of heaven: so that if be a son, you must consign him at the proper age to a monastery, and if it be a daughter, you must consent to immure her in a convent."

'"But my people will demand that the heir to the throne be not taken from them!" exclaimed Ildirim, in a tone of rending anguish.

'"And if your majesty yields to the people in that instance," replied the Armenian solemnly, "'tis the same as surrendering up your first-born to Satan."

'"Oh! my dear husband," murmured Almeria, throwing herself at the king's feet, "I implore you to hearken to the counsel of this holy man and follow his advice in all that he has said."

'"It shall be as you wish my well-beloved," answered Ildirim, raising her up and embracing her tenderly, "but I tremble lest the result should be the loss of my throne."

'"Better to lose the throne," rejoined Almeria, in a voice of plaintive seriousness, "than suffer our first-born babe to lose its soul."

'Ildirim offered no farther remonstrance; and Heraclius, bidding him kneel at his feet, prayed long and fervently once more. The King repeated the intercessions which fell from the lips of the pious Armenian, and which were also echoed by Almeria. Then, in due form, but without ceremony, did Ildirim vow and devote his yet unborn child to the service of heaven; and as the last words of the solemn dedication fell from his lips, a sound as of the rush of mighty but invisible wings swept through the apartment—the atmosphere grew suddenly heated, heavy and oppressive—the light burnt with a lurid flame, and then a low but plainly audible peal of demoniac laughter smote the startled ears of Ildirim the King, Almeria the Queen, and Heraclius the Priest.'

CHAPTER XXX.

CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF SATANAIS.

'MONTHS passed away, and at length the time arrived when queen Almeria was to become a mother. The inhabitants of the metropolitan city had already made immense preparations to celebrate the event; and couriers were in readiness to convey the intelligence to the governors of the provinces. The queen herself, placing a full and implicit reliance upon all that Heraclius had done in order to defeat the purposes of Satan, was contented, cheerful and full of hope; but Ildirim, being a Mahometan and consequently, less sanguine in the efficacy of a christian's advice, was tortured with innumerable fears. He however concealed the state of his feelings as well as he was able, not only for the sake of Almeria, whom he loved so tenderly, but because it would have appeared strange in the extreme, had he manifested a gloomy aspect on such an occasion. For, as yet, I must observe, not a syllable had been breathed relative to the dedication of the expected babe to the Christian faith and the service of heaven: the secret remained with the King, the Queen, and Heraclius.

'The crisis arrived, and the palace was thronged with the great dignitaries of the kingdom. Trade and commerce

were suspended in the city, and all hearts were full of expectation. It was early in the morning that the physicians were summoned to attend upon the queen; and at midday precisely the anxiously awaited event took place. But what was the consternation of Ildirim, when the intelligence was communicated to him that Almeria had borne him twin daughters!

'Terrible was the effort that it cost him to conceal his emotions, as he received the congratulations of his ministers and the grandees of the kingdom; and if they did observe an expression of chagrin upon his countenance, they attributed it to a certain feeling of disappointment at not having been blest with a male heir. For according to the laws and usages of Mussulman countries, females cannot reign. But the enthusiasm of the population was nevertheless great when the tidings were bruited abroad throughout the city; and in the meantime Ildirim, taking Heraclius aside, demanded in a tone tremulous with emotion, and hoarse with concentrated horror: "What is to be done—what will be the result—how stands the infernal compact now?'

'"The birth of twins was a casualty which we foresaw not, and thought not of,' responded the Armenian, in whose voice there was likewise a profound sorrow. "I know not how to advise or how to act, save by appealing to the mercy of Him who controls all human affairs, and who will not abandon to Satan those whom he chooses as his elect."

'"Then you have no hope to give me, reverend father?" murmured the unhappy Ildirim, covering his face with his hands; and bending forwards, he allowed free vent to his anguish. Heraclius, filled with grief, retired to his own chamber, in order to pray in solitude for the celestial inspiration to guide him how to act as a counsellor and a friend towards the royal pair; and scarcely was Ildirim left alone when he felt a hand laid heavily upon his shoulder. He knew the touch—Oh! yes, he knew it the very instant that he experienced it, for it was the same as on that memorable evening when he lay crouching and grovelling upon the ground at the foot of the tree, after his defeat by Mansour; and, recoiling now from that touch as if from the contact of a serpent, he groaned in the bitterness of his spirit, and raised not his eyes to meet those orbs which he *felt* were fixed upon him.

'"Miserable mortal," said the Fiend of Darkness, in that sonorous voice which rolled on his ears like a knell, proclaiming his doom; "you availed yourself of my services in the hour of your bitter need, and you have basely sought to fly from the condition whereupon my succor was granted. Prompted by the Armenian priest, whose virtues are abhorrent to my mind, and on whose head I will wreak full soon a bloody vengeance—prompted by him, I say, you thought to dedicate your first-born child to heaven; and, behold, the royal Almeria has presented you with two daughters at the same birth. Can you not understand, therefore, that while one of these babes is devoted to heaven, the other is dedicated to me? But I seek not to deprive you at present of that child which has thus become mine. No, the possession of the miserable infant is not what I seek; my views are to be fulfilled and my aims accomplished in another manner."

'"Then there is hope—oh! there is hope!" exclaimed Ildirim, now raising his head and venturing to look up at the King of Darkness, who stood like a mighty shadow, sombre, dread, and incomprehensible.

'"Hope!" repeated Satan, with a mocking laugh; "how often and how thrillingly does poor, weak, miserable Man give utterance to that word, during his short career on earth, and how constantly does he cherish a delusion! But if all that I am about to say to thee, O, Ildirim! can constitute hope, then cling to it—hug it—feast upon it," continued the Evil One, with an infernal raillery in his tone, that cut like a two-edged sword into the heart of the wretched king. "Yes, keep the babes," exclaimed Satan; "and thou wilt soon distinguish which belongs to heaven, and which to me. Beautiful shall they both become—oh! transcendantly beautiful; but the loveliness of the former shall be that of heaven's own radiant beings, whereas that of the latter shall be of the dark splendor of the fallen angels. And to this one, which is *mine*, shalt thou give the name of *Satanais*, thus marking her as the daughter of Satan from the first hour of her birth. Do this, and I will leave the infant in the arms of her mother: disobey me, and I will at once claim the execution of our compact, and tear the infant from thine Almeria's embrace, even before thine eyes."

'"No, no! spare the babe!" ex-

claimed Ildirim, all his fears being excited on behalf of the young wife whom he loved so tenderly, and whose heart he knew would break were the demon's dread menace carried into execution.

'"Spare the babe, I say," he repeated in a tone of passionate appeal, "and her name shall be *Satanais!*"

'"It is well," said the King of Darkness, his voice expressing the joy of an infernal triumph; "perchance she will some day prove an useful instrument in my hand, and purchase her own redemption by consigning the souls of many victims to my power."

'Bewildered and amazed, Ildirim fixed his eyes upon the countenance of Satan, in order to read, if possible, in those features so handsome and yet so terrible, the true meaning and purport of the words which he had just uttered.

'"Listen and understand," proceeded the King of Darkness, after enjoying Ildirim's uncertainty and cruel suspense for a few moments. "It shall be my care to endow Satanais—*my* child—with a beauty so splendid in its dark glory, and so magnificent in its midnight lustre, that the world never shall have seen the like; so that when she grows up in the pride and pomp of her matchless charms, the bravest and handsomest cavaliers will fall on their knees before her, beseeching her to assign to them some perilous task or desperate enterprise, which they may undertake to prove their devotion, and in the hope that success will recommend them to her heart's favor. Then will she tell them that an evil spirit has cast his spells around her, and that he who would win her hand must meet and conquer that denizen of hell in deadly combat. And as many knights," continued Satan, fixing his burning eyes upon Ildirim, who listened in speechless horror to these explanations; "as many knights and gallant cavaliers will venture upon even a feat so terrible as *this*, in the hope of winning the hand of Satanais, and as the vanquished will become *mine*, both body and soul, the result must be that the charms of Satanais will prove the means of peopling my kingdom rapidly. For never is man so reckless of his immortal soul as when woman's bright eyes have fascinated him; and the eyes of Satanais shall be bright indeed!"

'"Oh! this is terrible—terrible!" exclaimed Ildirim, writhing in anguish at the feet of Satan. "Can naught appease thee, dread fiend? or must my innocent child be doomed even from its birth thus to minister to thine infernal interests?"

'"Call her not *your* child," said the King of Darkness, in a stern tone; "at least not in my presence. She is *my* child, and already is she named the Daughter of Satan!"

'"And can nothing rescue her from thy power? are there no means of purchasing her redemption? but must she become, as she grows up in her beauty, the instrument of thy rage and hate against the human race?" exclaimed Ildirim, accompanying these passionate demands with bitter lamentations.

'"I dare not refuse to respond to thy queries," returned Satan, an awful gloom spreading over his countenance, "and the same supernatural influence which forces me thus to answer thee, compels me likewise to reveal myself in my weakness as I have already proclaimed myself to thee in my strength. For He whose name I dare not mention, but who reigns above, hath decreed that no evil can exist without its cure; no bane without its antidote. Thus, although Satanais hath been doomed to my service and dedicated to my interests by the consent of her own father; yet may she be rescued and redeemed from all the consequences of the solemn compact."

'"And the means of thus rescuing her?—the method of achieving her redemption?" cried Ildirim the king, hope springing up in his breast; and as he put these questions with impassioned vehemence, he rose from his crouching position at Satan's feet and ventured to look searchingly and fixedly upon the countenance, which grew darker and more menacing than the blackest cloud that ever was laden with the thunder, the lightning, and the storm.

'"Mortal! I am forced by an irresistible influence to answer thee," exclaimed Satan, his voice sounding loud and appalling to the ear; "but since thou hast thus compelled me to expose my weakness, know that henceforth my hatred against thee and thine shall be implacable. Thou askest by what means Satanais may be rescued from the thraldom in which our compact places her with regard to myself?—Years must pass ere the attempt at such redemption can even be made; for when she shall have grown up into the glory and splendor of her charms, should it so happen that there be found a Christian knight who will espouse her cause through friendship and compas-

sion only, and not in the hope of winning her hand or engaging her love, *then* may her salvation be wrought and her emancipation won by such a champion. But if she should reach and pass her twentieth year; if the hour of midnight on that anniversary of her birth should see no champion arise to combat in her cause against *myself*—then shall she become mine beyond all possibility of redemption—*mine*, to do my bidding and obey me in all things—*mine*, to dazzle the bravest knights with her lustrous eyes, and lure them on unto destruction—*mine*, to procure me proselytes and to people my kingdom with the lost souls that have been sacrificed to her charms!"

'And then Satan entered into some farther details with Ildirim; but it is unnecessary to explain them, for this sad and terrible history has already lasted too long, and there yet remains much to tell. Suffice it to say, then, that the Fiend of Darkness passed away from the presence of my unhappy father, who, when he once more found himself alone, could scarcely believe that he had heard aright. But, alas! a second thought convinced him that it was indeed all too true; for the words of Satan rang in his ears; and even if he had still continued sceptical in despite of them, there was a mark upon his wrist which forbade him to treat it all as a dream. Yes, that fatal mark, which five months previously had been imprinted upon his arm, remained indelible with its sinister blackness, as if it were a type of his own sad fate!

'Overwhelmed with grief; foreseeing a terrible future not only for himself and his beloved Almeria, but likewise for myself, at that moment an infant newly born; my father hastened to the chamber of Heraclius in order to communicate to the good Armenian priest all that had just taken place. He opened the door and entered the room; but, great heaven! what a spectacle of horror met the eyes of Ildirim. The venerable Heraclius was no more; he had been murdered—destroyed; nay, literally torn to pieces! Weltering in the blood that was still warm and reeking, the dismembered remains were scattered upon the carpet; the legs here, the arms there; even the very head wrenched off and the eyes scooped out! It was horrible—most horrible; and staggering back, with a sickening sensation at the heart; a whirling in the brain; and the smell of human gore in the nostrils, the king was about to summon his dependants and give the alarm of murder, when the withering, blasting reminiscence flashed to his mind that Satan had vowed to wreak a sanguinary vengeance upon the head of the Armenian priest!

'The Prince of Darkness was, then, the author of this tremendous crime; the principal actor in the astounding tragedy that thus spread its hideous and appalling details before the eyes of Ildirim the king"

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF SATANAIS.

'Now came the wild rush of bewildering thoughts through the already half-maddened brain of the youthful sovereign:—What was he to do? should he summon his dependants and allow them to form their own ideas respecting the crime? or should he endeavor to shroud it in darkness and conceal it altogether? Yes, *for his own sake* must he adopt this latter course: otherwise suspicion would point to him as the murderer; for had he not been observed to take Heraclius aside in a mysterious manner? Moreover it was absolutely necessary to veil the appalling tragedy from Almeria and invent any tale to account for the disappearance of the venerable priest.

'It is difficult to imagine, and totally impossible to describe how the wretched Ildirim could so far compose his features as to be enabled to visit his wife's chamber without exciting suspicion that something dreadful had occurred. Certain it is, however, that having carefully secured the door of the apartment containing the mangled remains of the Armenian priest, he hastened to embrace his beloved Almeria and behold the twin-children she had borne him. And, as he bent over the young mother, he could read in the anxious look of inquiry which she fixed upon him, the thoughts that were passing in her soul: and, stooping down, he whispered words, which, though vague and indefinite, were nevertheless calculated to comfort and re-assure her.

'When the deep midnight came and darkness ruled the earth, Ildirim repaired to the chamber where the murdered Heraclius lay. Gathering the

gory remains together, he put them into a sack and carried the burthen by a secret staircase to the garden His intention was to dig a hole for the purpose of interring the dismembered corpse. Yes, with his own hands did Ildirim begin to ply the spade and the pick-axe; and the moon came out in its silent majesty to contemplate the work. But inexperience in the use of delving instruments, joined to a terrible apprehension of being discovered in the midst of his employment, impeded the task to such an extent that he abandoned it, and once more shouldering the burthen, he traversed the grounds, let himself out by a gate at the farthest extremity, and sped precipitately towards the adjacent river with the view of committing the sack and its contents on its deep and silent bosom. But just as he was about to hurl his terrible load into the water, a human form suddenly emerged from amidst a knot of trees.—Ildirim dropped the sack in his terror, and was about to turn and fly, when he was caught in a powerful grasp, and the moon revealed to him the countenance of Kara Ali, that wicked minister whom he had banished from the kingdom at the time of Mansour's invasion!

'Ildirim's first impulse was to draw his poinard and strike it into the heart of this most unwelcome witness of his midnight adventure: but at the next moment he shuddered at the idea of perpetrating such a crime, and moreover, he saw that it might be a death struggle between them as Kara Ali was armed to the teeth.

'"Unhand me, minion!" exclaimed the King, perceiving that he was recognised.

'"I obey your majesty," responded Kara Ali: "but beware how you attempt to deal treacherously by me, for all monarch though you be, I will either sell my own life as dearly as possible, or else take yours."

'"Let there be peace between us," said Ildirim, cruelly embarrassed how to act, but deeming it more prudent to adopt a conciliatory policy. "What has brought you again into my dominions? wherefore are you here!"

'"I was about to visit the metropolis privately in order to interest some friends in my behalf, with a view to obtain the pardon of your Majesty," answered Kara Ali. "But circumstances have now enabled me to dictate my own terms," he added, in a tone of cool insolence.

'"What mean you, rash man?" exclaimed Ildirim, trembling from head to foot, alike with rage and apprehension. "Speak, and remember that thou standest in the presence of thy king!"

'"And the honor, the safety, the reputation of that king are in my hands," said Kara Ali, solemnly and significantly. "This object," he continued, pointing towards the sack which lay at his feet, "tells its own tale. It fell with a sound and it lies there with a shape such as only one thing on earth can have; for the sound was dull and heavy; and the shape is unmistakeable; and it is a corpse, O Ildirim, which thou hast brought to consign to the crystal flood whose bosom mirrors yon silver orb of night!"

'"It is true! my God! it is too true!" exclaimed Ildirim, his chest heaving and his eyes rolling awfully. "But not by my hand was he slain—"

'"Then wherefore come hither to bury the victim thus clandestinely?" demanded Kara Ali. "Is this the deed of an innocent man; and that man the greatest monarch of the orient clime? But did not your majesty propose that there should be peace between us, and not war? Let there be peace, then, and the terms are easy. Silence and secrecy will be preserved by me; complete pardon and restoration to favor will be vouchsafed by you. Listen, O king! how this latter portion of the compact may be accomplished. To-morrow thou wilt proclaim a general forgiveness of all criminals and of all exiles; it will be an act of grace to celebrate the birth of thy children. Then, so soon as the glad tidings shall have been made known, will I hasten to the palace, throw myself at your majesty's feet, and demand to be included in the amnesty. Your majesty will grant my prayer; and my immediate restoration to fortune, rank, and power must follow."

'"Impossible!" cried Ildirim, "the people will rebel against me, if I discard a just and beloved minister to make room for one of evil repute such as thou."

'"The people will rebel more readily still," answered Kara Ali, in a determined voice, "if it be known that their king is a murderer!"

'"Thou dar'st not say it, villain!" exclaimed the young monarch, goaded almost to desperation.

'"I dare say anything that suits my purpose," rejoined Kara Ali, "and *there* is the ghastly witness that will confirm the charge!" he added, pointing significantly towards the sack.

'The wretched Ildirim was accordingly compelled to yield to the demands of the man whom accident had thus enabled to dictate his own terms. The compact was entered into; and the monarch gave his signet-ring as a pledge that the conditions should be fulfilled on his side. The corpse of the Armenian priest was then consigned to the river; and Ildirim returned to his palace, where he passed several hours in effacing the stains of blood from the floor of the apartment where the dreadful tragedy had occurred. At length he sought his couch, worn out in mind and body, and shudderingly averting his eyes from the contemplation of the future as he thought of the terrible past and the equally alarming present.

'In the forenoon of the following day the king held a grand court: and proclamation was made throughout the city that a general pardon was decreed to all defenders then in confinement, and an amnesty granted to all persons then in exile on account of political misdeeds. This intelligence produced the liveliest joy; but the feelings was suddenly changed into one of mingled consternation and dismay when the news spread abroad that Kara Ali had appeared at court and was received with high favor by the king. The ex-Minister's mansion and treasures, which had been confiscated, were restored to him; and a rumor spread abroad that there was every prospect of his being raised again to power. The excitement that prevailed was therefore great; but large sums of money were distributed amongst the royal guards, and every precaution was adopted to meet any emergency. A few days elapsed, at the expiration of which the worst fears of the people were confirmed; for the good Ministers were dismissed suddenly, and Kara Ali and his friends were restored to office. Some disturbances ensued in the capital; but the troops mowed down the insurgents with a merciless fury; and, alas! the tyranny of my father was cemented by his subjects' blood.

'In the meantime he had soothed Almeria's mind by a variety of representations, some true and some false. He explained to her the particulars of his interview with the Prince of Darkness on the day when she became a mother; and she thus learnt that the infancy and girlhood of myself were likely to remain unmolested by the Evil One, and that there was a hope of emancipating me altogether from his influence, when I should grow up to woman's estate. Respecting Heraclius, my father assured his confiding wife that the venerable priest had undertaken a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in order to move heaven by his prayers to frustrate the designs of Satan altogether, and accomplish the salvation of myself without the contingent fulfilment of the condition stipulated by the Enemy of Mankind, as the only means of my rescue. These explanations satisfied my mother; and she was too much engrossed with her babes to devote any attention to the state of public feeling which was agitating so menacingly without.

'Time wore on, and three years passed away. The name of *Satanais*, as I have already informed you, had been bestowed upon myself; and that of *Gloria* was given to my sister, as typical of the service of heaven to which she had been devoted, even before her birth. And now the truthfulness of Satan's prophecy began to develope itself: *for beautiful indeed were we both—oh! transcendantly beautiful; but the loveliness of Gloria was of heaven's own radiant beings, whereas that of myself was of the dark splendor of the fallen angels!*—Think not, however, that any idle sentiment of vanity has induced me to associate an idea of beauty with these occasional allusions to myself; impute not to me so unworthy a motive. No, far from it! It is the nature of my narrative which compels me thus to deal with facts that so nearly and intimately concern my doom, my destiny; for it is no merit on my part that I am beautiful—no virtue deserving commendation that I am endowed with personal attractions. Alas! alas! 'tis a loveliness which may yet become a fatal instrument in the hands of Satan, despite all my endeavors to the contrary; and thus is this beauty a curse rather than a blessing—a reproach rather than a source of pride or joy!

'Need I tell you how anxiously, how tenderly, how devotedly, our mother watched the growth of her cherished twins, and marked the development of their contrasting styles of beauty? Nevertheless, it was only in the color of our hair and the hue of our complexions, that Gloria and myself were so un-

like each other. For our eyes were of the same darkness; but our parents often whispered together that the light of heaven shone in those of my sister, whereas a sinister and ominous lustre gleamed in mine. The hair of Gloria was perfectly radiant, golden, without being yellow—auburn, without the slightest tint of red; it seemed like a mass of sunbeams, and illuminated her coentenance as if she were indeed an angel. The sea-shell pink and the fairness of the lily blended upon her cheeks; and well did she become the name that had been bestowed upon her! As for myself, the dark olive complexion, the hair black as night, and that strange unnatural lustre shining in the eyes, were regarded by my parents as the sure indications that Satan indeed exercised an influence over me.

'Three years, I have already observed, had passed away from the moment of the birth of Gloria and myself; and during this interval Kara Ali had held the office of prime minister. The popular discontent which marked his restoration to power, accompanied his career, increasing daily, and being prevented from exploding only by the menacing attitude of the troops. The rapacity, oppression, and injustice which characterised Kara Ali's administration were extreme; and the kingdom was rapidly falling from a condition of the highest prosperity into a state of anarchy and confusion. Meantime Ildirim troubled himself but little respecting the affairs of the nation; dispirited and almost heart-broken by the *one* grand misfortune of his life, that calamity which had led to so many others, he shut himself up in his palace, leaving his people entirely at the mercy of the ministers, and seeking solace only in the company of his wife and children. For to them was he devotedly attached; and, although deserving the denomination of a bad king, he was beyond all question a kind husband and affectionate father. The people at length became louder in their murmurs and more menacing in their attitude. They said, "a spell has again fallen upon our king. During the first two years of his reign he resigned himself to dissipation. The presence of invaders alone awoke him from his luxury; and then for a season he proved himself a good, wise, and just prince. But he has once more deserted the cause of his people; and, although he has not relapsed into a life of luxuriousness, yet his affections are alienated from us. Moreover, one of his children is dedicated to the service of the Christian's God;" for this circumstance respecting Gloria was now generally known throughout the country. "And with regard to the other child," continued the people in their murmurings, "she bears a terrible name, and her eyes, which fascinate like those of the serpent, and vibrate like a star, prove that she is indeed the daughter of Satan." Such were the observations which grew daily more and more frequent in the city; and the popular discontent was gathering with the threatening concentration of a volcano, when a circumstance occurred which all on a sudden produced a terrific explosion.

'It appears that some fishermen were one day pursuing their avocation on the bank of the river passing near the capital city, when one of them drew up a heavy object in his net. It proved to be a sack tied at the mouth; and, on opening it, the remains of a dismembered corpse were discovered. Although three years and upwards had elapsed since the corpse had been consigned to the depths of the river, the water had to some extent retarded the progress of decomposition; and the mangled remains were borne into the city. Immense crowds collected, and a terrible indignation was manifested by the populace. For inasmuch as prosperity and plenty had until latterly rendered enormous crimes very scarce, the general horror was proportionately increased by the discovery of these proofs that some appalling tragedy had been consummated. The blame was immediately thrown upon the detested ministers; and the cry of "To the palace!" being raised, thousands and thousands flocked thither, the corpse being borne in the midst of the angry multitude.

'Ildirim the king was walking with Almeria in the royal gardens, watching Gloria and myself, who were disporting in infantine glee amidst the parterres of flowers. Suddenly the sounds of myriads of voices came rolling upon our ears like distant thunder; and the dependants rushed with affrighted countenances to warn the king that the citizens had risen in open rebellion and were surrounding the palace. Scarcely was the astounding intelligence communicated, when other messengers arrived with the still more alarming news that the guards had refused to obey their officers and had joined the people. A gleam of courage returned to the soul

of my father, animating him with resolution to meet the emergency. His intention was imparted in a few hurried words to Almeria, and she instantaneously assented. Veiling her apprehensions as well as she was able, and feeling herself capable of making any sacrifice for the sake of her husband and her children, she took Gloria's hand while my father took mine; and in this manner we all went forth to meet the insurgent multitudes, who had by this time forced their way into the outer court-yard of the royal dwelling.

'At the appearance of the king and his beauteous queen, leading forward their two innocent children, a faint murmur of mingled applause and sympathy rose from the foremost of the crowd; but this expression of feeling was in another moment drowned by a terrific cry for vengeance upon the hated Ministers, as a few daring, desperate men burst forth from the midst of the dense mass of people, and threw down the mangled remains of the corpse at our feet! Oh! well, how well can I recollect the shuddering horror which impelled Gloria and myself to press close to our parents' sides and avert our eyes from that hideous spectacle; and, child of little more than three years old as I was at the time, yet so vivid was the impression made upon me by the awful scene that it now appears as if it were only enacted yesterday. Yes; and the expression which my father's countenance suddenly took, as I threw up my gaze towards him, is one of memory's never to be forgotten portraits; and a fearful cry burst from his lips;—a cry which came, fraught with ineffable anguish, from a heart that was shedding forth its unseen tears of blood!—My mother clung to *him* with the same feeling which prompted Gloria and myself to cling to *them;* and in the first few instants which thus elapsed from the moment that the body was abruptly flung before our eyes; in those few instants, I say, were concentrated ages of anguish, of horror, and of dismay!

'But this portion of the scene was too terrible to last long; and, excruciating mental tortures giving their uncontrollable impulse to my father's tongue, he spoke forth the fatal truth in the madness which seized upon his brain.

'"O God! this is retribution for my crime, my dreadful crime!" he exclaimed, falling upon his knees, clasping his hands, and extending his arms towards heaven. "It is the corpse of Heraclius, the murdered Armenian priest—the good old man——"

'But his passionate vehemence was suddenly checked, for a rending shriek burst from the lips of Almeria, and she sank senseless upon the ground, within a few paces of the putrescent remains of the corpse of her best friend!

'It would be impossible to describe the scene of confusion, of terror, and of consternation that ensued. The rapidity of events was commensurate with that hurry which whirled in our brains. The words of my father, though in reality alluding to the crime of which he had been guilty in making a compact with Satan, were naturally mistaken by the millions, to whom the appalling secret was unknown, for a confession of the murder of Heraclius the Armenian priest. I scarcely know what followed. Certain, however, it is that the guards experienced the utmost difficulty in protecting the king from the rage of the people; and within an hour he quitted the city as an exile, in disguise, and accompanied by his wife and children.

'Accompanied by a small escort and attended by a few faithful adherents, we journeyed rapidly towards the frontiers, and in a few days entered the dominions of King Mansour. The object of my parents was to proceed to the Court of the King of Georgia, Almeria's father; and for this purpose it was necessary to traverse the territory of Ildirim's late enemy. It was, however, hoped that the deep disguise which he wore would enable him to accomplish this perilous task in safety; but our presence and movements in Mansour's realms were betrayed, and my father was arrested. Vainly did Almeria implore that she might be allowed to share his captivity. The orders of the tyrant were peremptory, and as remorsely executed. The fugitive monarch was thrown into a strong fortress, while my mother was compelled to pursue her journey without delay. Gloria and myself, her two innocent children, were now her only consolation; but even the circumstance that we were left to her, failed to elevate her mind from the depths of despair. Our family seemed a doomed one; our race accursed—the compact with Satan proved an infernal spell exercising its terrible enchantment over every incident in our lives—giving a color to our destiny—determining our fate! Even upon Gloria, devoted to heaven though she were, did the same baleful effect seem to fall.

—All these reflections drove my unhappy mother almost to madness; and heart-broken did she reach the Court of her father, the King of Georgia.—There, at least, we found a home and a refuge; and messengers were expedited to King Mansour's capital to propose a ransom for my captive father. During their absence Almeria endeavored to buoy herself up with the hope that they would succeed; but it was with difficulty that she could sustain her courage, for misfortune had placed a death-wound in her heart; not that wound which kills at once, but the wound which destroys slowly as if a barbed arrow were rankling therein!

'After a long absence the messengers returned from Mansour's Court, having succeeded in their object. The ransom had been accepted, my father was released, and once more had he the satisfaction of embracing his wife and children. A year passed away, during which time my mother's health gradually became more alarming, and Ildirim himself appeared heart-broken and a prey to despair. The King of Georgia, who loved his daughter tenderly and looked upon his son-in-law as an unfortunate but not a guilty monarch, imagined that they were pining for the loss of their kingdom; and, without consulting them upon the subject, but believing that he should afford them the pleasure of a most agreeable surprise, he made vast military preparations, which were carried on with as much secrecy as expedition. When all were completed he mustered his immense army upon a plain in the vicinity of Tefflis, the Georgian capital; and taking my father and mother forth to behold the mighty armament, he exclaimed, "That force is thine, O Ildirim: place thyself at its head, and go and reconquer thy dominions from an insurgent people!" Then the animation of joy suffused itself over my father's countenance; and Almeria, observing the emotions of delight which he thus experienced, devoured her grief, wiped away her tears, and exerted herself to assume the appearance of participating in his pleasure.

'To be brief, my father embraced his wife and children and departed at the head of that mighty army. But in the meantime the affairs of his own kingdom had grown so desperate, a civil war having taken place between the adherents of Kara Ali and the patriotic party, that Mansour, profiting thereby, had invaded the territory and completely subjugated it. Kara Ali was put to death, and Mansour became king. It was therefore against this monarch and his forces that Ildirim had to contend; and for upwards of two years did hostilities continue, with varying success, in that distracted country. From an earthly paradise was it thus changed into a scene of desolation, ruled by a Moloch of blood and slaughter. At length my father was completely defeated in a great battle; and with the utmost difficulty did he succeed in escaping from the power of his conquerors. Wretched in mind and exhausted in body, he returned to Tefflis, the bearer of the intelligence of his own discomfiture; and soon afterwards he died of a broken heart.

'I shall not attempt to describe my mother's rending grief at the loss of him whom she had loved so tenderly and so well. Gloria and myself were old enough to understrnd and appreciate it; and many were the tears which we shed when ouo widowed parent wept bitterly, bitterly over us. But the extent of our misfortunes was not yet reached; for we were shortly to become wanderers on the face of the earth. The King of Persia, Georgia's implacable enemy, hearing of the total destruction of the fine army which had marched forth from Tefflis under Ildirim, deemed it a fitting opportunity to invade the territory of his neighboring foe. Collecting all his remaining forces, my royal grandfather marched against the Persians, but was completely routed; and being taken prisoner, he was cruelly put to death. The conquerors pushed on to Tefflis, which held out for some weeks against the besiegers, who, however, carried it at length by storm, and a terrible massacre ensued. All the brothers and sisters of my mother fell into the hands of the ferocious Persian Shah, who immolated the former to his vengeance and kept the latter for his harem: but the widowed, desolate, and almost distracted Almeria was fortunate enough to escape with Gloria and myself, attended only by one faithful domestic.

'We came into Europe—traversed the huge provinces of the Ottoman Empire—and at length reached Bohemir. Why my mother fixed upon this country as her future abode, I am not able to inform you. It might have been by accident, or by some impulse which she herself could not understand, or else

through a motive which she never explained. Certain, however, it is, that she purchased a small villa in a secluded spot at a distance of about ten leagues from Prague, and there she devoted herself to the nurture of myself and Gloria. She had brought with her a quantity of valuable jewels from Georgia; and thus her pecuniary resources were ample. But she was not destined to remain long in this world: the Almighty determined to make her a saint in heaven. Six months after she had settled in Bohemia, death tore her from the children whom she loved so tenderly, and who loved her so passionately in return. Thus Gloria and myself were left orphans, at the tender age of nine, the faithful old domestic being our guardian. Some years passed, and when we had numbered our sixteenth summer, *he* also died. But on his death-bed he called us to him, prepared us to hear a terrible tale, and then related all the varied incidents which I have now recounted, and which my mother ere her decease had unveiled to his knowledge. You may imagine far more easily than I describe how shocked both myself and sister were when the dread compact which my father had made with the Prince of Darkness was thus revealed to our ears,—accounting as it did not only for the whole chain of misfortunes which had fallen on the heads of our devoted parents, but likewise to the dedication of Gloria to the service of heaven—as well as for the marvellous contrast which existed between our complexions, and for the singularity of the Christian names that had been bestowed upon us!

'A year afterwards Gloria entered a convent. Fain would I have accompanied her; but it was necessaay that I should remain abroad in the world in order to court the means of emancipating myself from the thraldom of Satan. For did he not say "that when I should have grown up into the glory and splendor of my charms, should it so happen that there be found a Christian knight who would espouse my cause through friendship and compassion only, and not in the hope of winning my hand or engaging my love, then might my salvation be wrought and my emancipation won by such a champion. But if I should reach and pass my twentieth year—if the hour of midnight on that anniversary of my birth should see no champion arise to combat in my cause against *Satan himself*—then should I become his beyond all possibility of redemption,—*his*, to do his bidding and obey him in all things,—*his*, to dazzle the bravest knights with my lustrous eyes, and lure them on unto destruction, —*his*, to procure him proselytes and to people his kingdom with the lost souls that would be sacrificed to my charms!"

'Yes—such was the declarations made by the Enemy of Mankind; and in the hope of finding a champion to undertake my cause have I sought the scenes of warfare and the bustling encampments of armies. Four years have passed since the fatal secret was revealed to me by the old domestic on his death-bed; and in the meantime numberless suitors have thrown themselves at my feet imploring my love; but, alas! alas! I saw that weeks and months were passing rapidly—my hour was drawing nigh—and no Christian knight demanded my friendship or offered to become my champion in any cause or service that I might name. Hoping to find more truthfulness and sincerity of heart amongst the Taborites, and flattering myself that if ever such a champion were to rise up in my favor it would be from the ranks of that gallant band to whom selfishness is unknown,—under these impressions. I say, did I join them. The generous Zitzka gave me his hospitality, and to him did I reveal my tale of terror, mystery and wonder. The fact that he thus became acquainted with my narrative debarred him from becoming my champion; because the offer of friendship and the demonstration of sympathy must be made by one ignorant at the time of all that concerns me. Amongst the Taborites I received attentions the most delicate and a respect the most profound: but the charmed words were not breathed in my ears. Thus, with an anxious heart, and frequently overwhelmed by appalling fears, did I behold the time passing: for on the fifteenth day of August—this very month—shall I complete my twentieth year!

'At length—Oh! at length, a knight appeared. Heaven threw him in my way at a moment when hope seemed to be abandoning me. He came to the Taborite encampment one evening, and next morning he departed again. But ere he went, we walked alone together in the wood. He asked me if I were happy, and I replied by a question. "*Who is entirely happy in this world?*"

I said. "*Believe me, dear lady,*" he replied, "*believe me when I assure you that it will afflict me severely if I thought that you were unhappy.*" Gracious heaven! how my heart beat; for he nad given me his sympathy! The conversation proceeded, and he demanded my friendship! I could scarcely believe in my own happiness; for I felt convinced that this knight was destined to be the instrument of my salvation Still he had not as yet offered to become my champion in any cause that I might name or in any service that I might dictate. But we met again—yes, here, upon this very terrace, eight days ago; and then, oh! *then* he made the chivalrous proposal—he spoke the words so ardently longed for—he breathed the offer of championship which was to gladden my soul. And that knight whom heaven has thus sent to save me—that warrior who is to achieve my emancipation from the thraldom of Satan,—it is thou, Sir Ernest de Colmar!'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE VOW.

As Satanais uttered these last words in a tone of gushing enthusiasm,—the golden melody of her voice swelling into the richest harmony of pathos mingled with a thrilling fervor—she sank upon one knee at the feet of the Austrian Knight; and, while she pressed his hand in both her own, her up-raised countenance evinced the burning hope and the intense anxiety with which she waited for the answer to her appeal. From her silver palace in the deep, deep empyrean blue, the white beams of the moon shone upon those splendid features which thus eloquently expressed the emotions that agitated the soul; shone, too, upon that heaving bosom which rose so grandly from the boddice of purple velvet. And in the eyes which gazed up into those of Sir Ernest de Colmar, the argentine light was reflected with a far more powerful lustre; but mingling with that supernal effulgence which glowed in the eyes of Satanais, there was now a winning softness, as if the radiance streaming from the portals of paradise were blending insensibly with the vivid glare sent forth from the flames of hell.

Never—never had the beauty of the Daughter of Satan seemed so magnificent in its unearthly splendor to the eyes of Sir Ernest de Colmar. Transfixed to the spot—rendered speechless and motionless by wonderment and admiration—experiencing the enthralment of every sense in the mingled ardor and ecstacy with which he contemplated that kneeling houri, he could not immediately raise her from her suppliant posture—he could not immediately respond to her appeal Strange and glowing thoughts swept through his mind; and in the dark glory of that romantic creature's loveliness, his imagination led him to behold all the sublimity of the beauty which still characterised Satan even after his fall, but none of the terrors that became the inevitable consequences of that degradation from the archangel state!

'Oh! speak, brave warrior; speak, Ernest, and leave me not in this cruel suspense!' exclaimed Satanais, after the lapse of a few minutes of profound silence. 'Thou hast offered me thy sympathy; thou hast demanded my friendship; and thou didst even declare that were the Enemy of Mankind to start up as my foe, he should find an opponent in thee! Tell me, then, dost thou repent of these assurances? were they uttered in a moment of enthusiasm which in thy calmer mood thou hast been led to regret? If so, I release thee, Ernest, from that pledge of friendship which thou didst make; I give thee back the vows of championship which came so welcome to my ear and so full of hope to my heart; and we will separate, never to meet again!' added Satanais, her voice becoming low, tremulous and plaintive, and her countenance bending over de Colmar's hand so that her smooth, warm, and polished brow reposed upon it.

'Not for worlds would I prove a recreant to promises spontaneously given!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, raising the Daughter of Satan from her kneeling attitude; then taking both her hands in his own and looking earnestly into the depths of those splendid orbs which shone with a lustre wherein pathos and power were so strangely blended, he said in a tone moved with the music of profound feeling, so that his voice sounded in manly richness and fullness upon her ears,—'Lady, I am incapable of performing the part of an empty boaster and an idle braggart. To a certain course am I pledged, and that course will I adopt.

Even had I given no promise before I heard thy tale, I should give it now. Yes, I have demanded thy friendship, and I am proud of possessing so inestimable a boon; I have offered the tribute of my sincerest sympathy, and I will incur any risk to restore thee to happiness. Again, therefore, as on the occasion of our former meeting on this spot,—again do I invoke yon chaste orb of night to attest the vow which I take in the presence of high heaven—the vow of a Christian warrior, the lustre of whose name has never been dimmed by disgrace! And this vow is to the effect that I will become thy champion, Satanais; clothed in my trusty panoply of steel, I will go forth to battle with the Enemy of Mankind; and, reposing my confidence in that Almighty Being who hurls the thunder and directs the lightning, I will venture upon this combat with the King of Hell. O, Moon! thou pure and stainless regent of the night, bear witness to this vow of mine; and, as thy voice belongs to that sweet chorus which makes the harmony of the spheres, let it sound throughout the vault of heaven to register my solemn promise there!'

'Ernest, thou art the bravest as well as the best of men,' murmured Satanais, in a voice which was now liquid and gentle with the expressive music of the soul: 'but again I conjure thee to reflect—to weigh well the tremendous peril thou art about to encounter, and to rush not rashly upon this appalling path of danger!'

'My vow is registered in heaven's high chancery, Satanais,' responded the Austrian knight, in a tone of god-like heroism; 'and even it thou thyself wast to fall upon thy knees and implore me to recant, the appeal were made in vain! Tell me, then, dear friend—tell me, thou in whose welfare I experience so deep an interest,—tell me how I am to proceed; direct my actions; prompt me in the course that I am to pursue, so that I may go forth at the fitting hour and to the proper place to encounter the fiend whose accursed machinations have already entailed so much misery upon the family whence thou art sprung.'

'Since thy generous purpose is thus firmly established,' said Satanais, fixing upon Sir Ernest de Colmar a look in which gratitude and admiration were blended with love, 'I shall no longer hesitate to impart all the information that is necessary to guide thee in thy stupendous enterprise. I have already told thee, while narrating my history, that on the occasion of the last interview which my deceased father had with the Prince of Darkness, certain details were entered into by the latter ere he passed away from Ildirim's presence. Those details I did not explain in their proper place in my narrative; because they referred only to the means which Satan pointed out as necessary for adoption at the period when a Christian Knight should appear as the champion of my cause, if such happiness were ever indeed in store for us.—That period has now arrived; this champion is found. Listen, then, my generous friend, to the course which it behoves thee to pursue. Clad in complete armor, with the vizor of thine helmet closed, must thou ride forth, at eleven o'clock on the night of the 15th of this month, from whatsoever habitation may at that moment be the place of thine abode. Unattended and alone it is necessary that thou shouldst be; the object of thine expedition being likewise kept a profound secret. On thus issuing from thy dwelling, thou wilt ride forward in an easterly direction and at a gentle pace; and thou wilt halt as nearly as thou canst conjecture within a quarter of an hour of midnight. Ample leisure will thus be afforded to enable thyself and thy good steed to rest ere the moment of terrible combat shall arrive. For precisely at twelve on that night will thine enemy emerge from the surrounding darkness; in terror, and mystery, and silence will he come; and then, O gallant warrior! may God help thee to the victory!—But should'st thou fail,' continued Satanais,' her voice suddenly falling to a tone so low and tremulous that it was scarcely audible, although she approached her countenance so close to De Colmar's ear that her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, 'but should'st thou fail,' she repeated, pressing his hand with a convulsive clasp, 'and should the Enemy of Mankind become the conqueror in the strange and terrible combat, *then* ——But—Oh! no, I cannot proceed; 'tis too dreadful to contemplate such an alternative!'

And laying her superb head upon the Knight's shoulder, Satanais was convulsed with sobs.

'Oh! my dearest friend,' exclaimed Sir Ernest, throwing his arms around the splendid creature and straining her to his breast with an almost passionate

vehemence, 'what conflict rages within thy soul? what cause for terrible agitation hast thou now? Speak, I conjure thee, Satanais, speak, and leave me not a prey to the cruellest suspense!'

The dark houri raised her head and fixed her gaze upon the countenance of De Colmar, from whose half-embrace she did not, however, extricate herself. Her luminous eyes flashed a moment; and then their expression melted into a softness which subdued their glorious light more completely than ever he had observed before—so that her looks became full of a winning tenderness, and all that was usually sublime, and splendid, and awe-inspiring in her beauty changed into the caressing blandishments of voluptuousness and passion. But this appearance vanished again almost in an instant; and recovering all the wonted dignity and magnificence of her looks; while the supernal flood of living light poured back into her eyes and the moonbeams played as if in circling glory with the jet and gloss of her hair; she said in a tone of profound gravity, 'Pardon this weakness, my dear friend,—a weakness of which I am ashamed. For heaven knows that it is for me to be courageous now, since the hope of salvation from the thraldom of Satan has assumed shape and substance in the championship of your noble chivalry.'

'It rends my soul to see you give way to despair,' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he once more led her gently along the moon-lit terrace. 'Put your faith in heaven, and all will be well.—For myself, I know not fear; I harbor not apprehension. But you were about to explain the aspect which this mysterious affair would assume in the event of my defeat by the Enemy of Mankind. Speak frankly, Satanais,—hesitate not to unburthen your bosom fully and completely to him who is proud of becoming your champion and who rejoices at being placed in a position to serve you.'

'Listen, then, Ernest—dear Ernest,' said the lady, 'for thou art indeed a dear and invaluable friend to me. But it is still with a shudder sweeping throughout my entire frame that I even for a moment fix my mental vision upon the terrible alternative which you have named. Nevertheless, 'tis necessary to touch upon that point. If, therefore, heaven should desert thee and the power of hell should triumph in this combat which on the seventh night hence thou wilt wage for my sake, then must thou either yield and assent to any conditions which Satan may choose to dictate; or else, dread alternative! he will be enabled to claim thee as his own; bear thee away from earth and all its enjoyments; and plunge thee into the unknown but terrible depths of his fiery realms!'

And again did Satanais, shuddering convulsively from head to foot, cling to her companion for support, and give vent to those sobs which she could not stifle.

'And now, my dearest friend,' said the knight, in a tone that trembled not, and which was re-assuring and firm, though fraught with tenderness; 'and now you have finished your explanations, and your instructions are complete?'

'I have naught more to say,' murmured Satanais: 'would to heaven,' she added with passionate vehemence, 'that my terrible destiny had not compelled me to say so much.'

'Take courage, tranquillize yourself, be comforted!' exclaimed the knight, pressing her to his bosom, and imprinting a fervent kiss on her dark but grandly beautiful forehead. 'I am not dismayed by aught that has fallen from your lips. Accustomed to look danger in the face, I am not alarmed by its presence, much less when it is still afar off. On the night which is to decide your fate, Satanais,' he continued, his tone assuming a gravity suitable to the observation he was about to make, 'you will pray for me, you will pass the hour of my ordeal upon your knees, and you will implore the succor of heaven for that cause which is now both yours and mine. And if I prove successful in this fight against the Prince of Darkness—'

'Oh! some secret influence will make the result known to me—some mysterious voice will whisper in my ear the event of the combat!' murmured Satanais. 'The instant that the shock of strife shall have passed, an inspiration will tell me whether thou hast warred successfully, or whether Satan has prevailed. Then, either a knell will sound in my heart—or a hymn of rejoicing and thanksgiving will raise its music in my soul!'

'Let us trust that it will be the latter,' said De Colmar, in a tone full of hope, but in which there was nothing vain-glorious, boastful, or presumptuous.

'Adjoining this palace—but on the opposite side,' continued Satanais, pointing towards the massive pile that shone grey in the silver moonlight, 'there is a chapel the door of which has been locked ever since the Taborites entered Prague a week back: for, as you are doubtless aware, they have closed many of the Catholic churches and converted the rest into temples of worship for the Reformers. The key of the chapel belonging to the palace I can procure,' observed the Daughter of Satan: 'thither shall I repair shortly before eleven on the night of the 15th, and there shall I offer up my prayers for thy success and safety!'

'And if heaven should indeed vouchsafe me success and bring me in safety from the conflict,' said De Colmar, 'I will join thee in that chapel within an hour after midnight. If otherwise—— But on *that* alternative we will not speculate,' he exclaimed, raising his head and drawing himself up in all the confidence of his chivalrous nature.

'I must now bid thee farewell, my brave and generous champion,' said Satanais, taking his hand and pressing it first to her lips, then to her heart. 'Farewell, dear Ernest,' she cried, in a tone of fervor and enthusiasm as she fixed her superb eyes with an expression of mingled admiration and passion upon his handsome countenance, 'farewell, and may all good angels accompany thee in the task of danger which thou hast undertaken! Farewell, and may strength nerve thine arm even as courage animates thy heart! In the interval which is to occur until the period of the combat, we must meet no more: how soon we meet afterwards, depends upon circumstances which heaven must control! Farewell, then, my kind and generous friend, farewell!'

And Satanais was about to depart precipitately, when Sir Ernest de Colmar retained her by the hand which he held in his own, threw his arms round her splendid form, strained her to his breast, and covered her brow, her cheeks, and her lips with kisses. Floods of ecstatic feelings poured into his soul, and kindred emotions were expressed in the swimming eyes of Satanais. For nearly a moment did she not only yield herself to his impassioned caresses, but gave them back with as fond an ardor. Everything—the future as well as the past—was forgotten by them both during this brief but elysian rhapsody of the feelings: and for both also did it seem as if those few instants contained the essence of life's cup of early joy!

But all on a sudden (and as if struck, or rather startled, by some thrilling idea) Satanais burst from the arms of the Knight; then, placing her finger upon her lip, she said in a tone of deep meaning but with bashful gravity, 'Remember that it is *friendship* which has made you my champion!'

Having thus spoken, she passed away with such rapidity and turned the adjacent angle of the building with such spirit-like speed, that had it not been for the rustling of her garments, she would have seemed an aerial being gliding and melting back again into the thin atmosphere which gave her a shadowy existence.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN AVOWAL OF LOVE.

For a week and upwards the city of Prague had been in the power of the Taborites: but no violence of any kind had been perpetrated in respect to the inhabitants. The three hostages, namely, the Marquis of Schomberg, the Count of Rosenberg, and the Baron of Altendorf, remained as prisoners in the Castle, where General Zitzka likewise took up his abode. A strong garrison was maintained in that fortress: the barracks were also filled with Taborites; and detachments of these armed Reformers were distributed in different parts of the city for the purpose of guarding against a surprise.

The nobles who had assembled at Prague to hold the council, had all dispersed and retired to their respective mansions and feudal castles, with the exception of the three hostages above named. The retainers of all those peers had been disarmed the moment Zitzka entered Prague; and some of them subsequently enrolled themselves voluntarily in the Taborite army, while the rest were suffered to depart to their homes.

In a word, the entire territory of Bohemia was now subjugated to the rule of the formidable John Zitzka surnamed the *One-Eyed*. Without assuming any other title than that of Captain-General of the Taborites, this extraordinary man became the administrator of the affairs of a large, rich, and populous country—a task quite unequal to his

powers; for though he was a brave warrior and experienced military leader, he was no statesman. As a religious Reformer he was an enthusiast rather than a philosopher; to speak truly, he was as much a fanatic in his devotion to the principles of John Huss as the Catholics were bigots to their own creed. His reasoning was the sword; his persuasion was intimidation; and he sought to proselytise by means of armies. Honest in purpose and well-intentioned, he was frequently led into grievous errors by his want of education and by a certain passion for intrigue which at times swayed him to a remarkable extent; indeed, he was often known to descend to petty chicanery to accomplish an aim which the bluntness of the soldier would have effected much more readily. Possessed of a heart naturally generous, he was nevertheless capable of waging a war of extermination against those who provoked him grievously or thwarted his purposes steadily; and even as he could prove himself a staunch friend, so might he become an implacable foe. Rough in manners, despising the refinements and abhorring the elegancies of life, and regarding luxury as a positive crime, he carried his ideas of primitive simplicity and patriarchal independence to such an extent as to contemn the fine arts, literature, and science; and while advocating a republicanism so extreme that it amounted almost to a system of communism, his notions on the subject were too crude to enable him to carry them out with any degree of success.

Thus with many elements of greatness in his character, John Zitzka was, nevertheless, a man thoroughly incompetent for the high post to which circumstances had raised him. To become really great, all he wanted was able counsellors and enlightened friends, whose assistance and advice would have have supplied and made up for all that was deficient in his own capacity. But he had not a single man of talent about his person. Learning was in those times principally confined to the priesthood; and this was the very class against whom he was waging war.—The nobility he likewise detested; and thus the only two grades which could have furnished him with advisers and political administrators, were those to which he chose not to address himself for aid. The middle and industrious classes were in that age steeped in ignorance; and from the latter of these two were Zitzka's retainers chiefly recruited. In a word, he possessed a powerful army and great military talents; but he was neither a politician himself, nor had a single statesman to counsel or assist him.

Nor, indeed, did John Zitzka seek for or court any such advice or any such aid. His ignorance made him believe that because he had obtained an illimitable influence over thousands of his fellow-countrymen, he must necessarily possess all the qualities adequate to govern them; indeed, he considered statesmanship to be a farce, diplomacy a mockery, policy a delusion; and he flattered himself that he, as a military leader, accumulated in his own person any amount of ability, capacity, and forethought that might be requisite for the promulgation of laws and the maintenance of society in a wholesome state of cohesion. Had he united real talent with his republicanism,—had he possessed the genius to elaborate his democratic notions,—he would have been a splendid character; but he was only fitted to lead an army and conduct military exploits.

We have seized a moment when a favorable opportunity appeared to present itself for affording a rapid sketch of the character of John Zitzka; and we now resume the thread of our narrative.

It will be remembered that on the same night when Sir Ernest de Colmar received the note from Satanais appointing that interview which has last been described, a billet from the Daughter of Glory was likewise put into his hand; and we may now observe that this latter communication specified the desire that Gloria experienced to meet him at a place and hour which she named.

But would Sir Ernest de Colmar keep this second appointment after all that had passed between him and Satanais? would he either entrust himself within the magic influence of Gloria's charms, or suffer her to suppose that such meetings as these could ever terminate in anything serious? We shall see.

At all events, we find him issuing forth on foot from one of the gates of Prague, a little before the hour of noon on the day following that memorable evening which marked his second interview with the Daughter of Satan in the palace gardens.

There was a partial shade of melancholy upon his handsome countenance, which likewise wore an expression of

firmness as if he had made up his mind to perform a duty that was imperious though painful. The same appearance of decision was manifested in his step; and altogether there was about him an air of seriousness and deep thought such as we have not seen him assume before.

On passing out of the city gate, Sir Ernest de Colmar entered a verdant grove which stretched for a short distance between the high road and the neighboring river Moldau, and the shade of which proved an agreeable relief from the scorching sultriness of the noon-day sun.

Threading the little wood, the Knight reached the bank of the river, which there ran broad and deep, and the margin of which was covered with flowers. Beautiful was inanimate nature there, with a luxuriant wilderness of sweets, with the grove shining beneath the powerful light of that sun which belonged to the month of fruits, and with the transparent stream taking its azure hue from the over-arching sky.

But not long was Sir Ernest de Colmar enabled to contemplate the peaceful loveliness of the scene; for a light footstep fell upon his ear, the adjacent foliage opened, and the Daughter of Glory beamed upon him with all the transcendant radiance of her sunny being! Yes, radiant and dazzling was she in spite of a certain air of modest reserve, amounting almost to a bashful timidy, which now deepened the roseate hue of her cheeks; but the lustre of her eyes, those magnificent eyes which shone with the very essence of the sun's most overwhelming power, imparted a luminous appearance to her entire countenance, while the flood of golden hair that rolled in heavy masses upon her shoulders and floated down her back in undulating richness, caught the sunbeams through the foliage and seemed to shed a brightness around the shady spot.

Extending her hand to De Colmar, but casting down her eyes, the divine creature said in a tone that was low and tremulous, 'Deem not my conduct indelicate, Sir Knight, in having thus ventured to solicit an interview; but I thought, I fancied, I even hoped,' she continued hesitatingly, 'that you would be desirous to receive some explanation from my lips to account for the abruptness with which I left you the other day upon the southern rampart of the city.'

'You disappeared, lady, with the rapidity of a fleeting spirit,' observed De Colmar, feeling that her hand trembled in his own; 'and until I had completely reviewed all that passed between us on that occasion, I was fearful of having given you some offence, though heaven knows it would have been most unintentional indeed!'

'Offence—oh! no—far from that!' exclaimed Gloria, suddenly raising her eyes and darting upon his countenance a luminous look full of passion and ineffable feeling. 'Let us seat ourselves in this cool shade and upon the flowery bank, and I will explain as concisely as possible a few circumstances which some strange and unaccountable influence prompts me to reveal, although perhaps it were more consistent with maidonly pride and delicacy to retain them profoundly secret in my own bosom.'

Thus speaking, the heavenly being sate down on the sloping bank; and as De Colmar followed her example, placing himself by her side, the glance which he threw upon her evinced the amazement, amounting even to trouble and agitation, which her words had excited in his mind; for no one could accuse him of vanity or presumption if the idea flashed to his imagination that those words, so singular and yet so significant, could herald only a softer and more tender discourse.

'Your acquaintance, Sir Knight, with Satanais and myself,' resumed Gloria, keeping her eyes bent downward as she thus spoke in a low and tremulous tone, has been but of short duration; and yet in that brief interval you have heard and seen enough of us both to make you aware that we are not like the generality of our sex. My sister has revealed to your ears the wild and wondrous narrative of our birth; the terrible and romantic tale of our destiny—and you are, therefore, at no loss to account for any singularity of manner, any peculiarity of feeling, or any eccentricity of character which may distinguish either or both of us. Our position in this world has hitherto been and continues to be one which places us beyond the ordinary conventionalities and the rigid forms which govern the community at large, and our sex in particular. Our minds have been modelled in a school and shaped by an experience such as no other women on earth have ever known; and neither should our sentiments nor our actions be judged and appreciated according to the ge-

neral standard. We stand as it were alone in the midst of the millions peopling this globe; exceptions to all the known rules which influence and determine the destiny of the human race. We are the creatures of circumstances unparalleled—unequalled! I ask you, then, Sir Knight, I appeal to you to pronounce whether our deeds and our thoughts can be estimated in the same manner, viewed in the same light, and weighed in the same balance as the conduct and the ideas of other women?'

'Assuredly not!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'And yet you are both incapable of deeds that would bring a blush to your cheeks!'

'Ought I not to blush for having invited you to meet me here to-day?' said Gloria, raising her eyes for a moment, flinging their dazzling lustre rapidly upon the knight, and then casting them down again. 'But you have already admitted that I am not bound by the ordinary rules and formalities which enthral the generality of my sex in adamantine chains; and I accept that admission as a proof that you are far, very far from being disposed to prejudge me harshly. Listen, then, Sir Knight—listen,' continued Gloria in a tone of increasing animation, 'to the words which I am about to utter.'

She paused for a few instants, and with her white hands put back the golden tresses which had fallen too far over her brow through bending down her head.

'My sister, my beloved sister,' she resumed, raising that glorious head, but looking steadily forward as she spoke, so that Sir Ernest de Colmar beheld her classic profile to its greatest advantage, 'my beloved sister has informed you that three years ago I entered a convent in pursuance of that ante-natal dedication to the service of heaven which my deceased parents had pronounced on my behalf. But the discipline of a cloister soon became intolerable; its monotony was enough to drive me mad. I loved and worshipped freedom; and the close imprisonment of a monastic life appeared to hem in my very spirit and surround my intellect itself with walls of iron. The beauties of nature, the green fields, the verdant groves, the pure air of the country, the singing of birds, the music of insect-life, the rippling of streams in their pearly path, and the azure loveliness of the sky—all, all seemed lost to me in the depths of that cloistral gloom. The silence of the convent by night was the stillness of a sepulchre; it was appalling! And by day the religious atmosphere of the place vibrated only to whispering voices, speaking low and moodily, save when those voices joined in hymns before the altar of the chapel. This was the only relief to the awful tranquillity which pervaded the convent; a tranquillity which appeared like the dead calmness of the tomb and left on the soul the chill impression that though time went on and on in the great world without, yet everything continued unchanged, unaltered within! For three years did I wrestle against the feelings which made me shudder at that conventual gloom, which made me recoil from that cloistral monotony! Often and often, when the moon was shining white and cold through the loop-hole of my cheerless cell, have I felt as if its rays pierced with the maddening effect of an ice-shaft through my brain; often and often as I wandered by day amongst the tombs in the sculptured aisles of the chapel, have I fancied that I was nothing more than one of the marble effigies temporarily endowed with the faculty of moving ghost-like through that place of sepulchres. At length I had a dream,—a strange, mysterious, and supernatural dream,—which determined me to renounce my vestal vows and leave the convent.

Again did Gloria pause: and, turning her eyes timidly upon Sir Ernest de Colmar, she instantaneously perceived by the expression of his countenance how deeply interested he had become in the narrative which she had commenced. Then did her features light up with smiles of joy, those glorious features beaming with the reflection of heaven's own blessed radiance; the carnation deepened upon her damask cheeks, the coral lips, wreathing with pleasure, displayed their rows of orient pearls, and the bosom of dazzling whiteness heaved with a satisfaction the most heartfelt and the most profound.

'You are listening to me with attention,' she exclaimed, the golden tones of her voice swelling almost into a pœan of triumph; 'and I thank you—oh! I thank you unfeignedly. The dream—that strange and supernatural dream, to which I have just alluded—will yet farther engross your interest. While sleeping on the hard pallet in my narrow coffin-like cell of solid masonry, methought that the moonbeams pouring

through the loop-hole gradually took a shape and form, and at length assumed the appearance of an angelic being. Its countenance was radiant with celestial beauty; its garments were of dazzling white, and its wings were shining as snow-flakes. I felt no terror, on the contrary, a holy ecstacy was excited in my soul. Then methought that the angel spoke in a voice liquid and flowing as a gentle stream; and these words were the words which he uttered—"Heaven releases thee from thy vows, O maiden, and gives thee back thy liberty. For three years hast thou struggled with all thine heart and with all thy soul against the feelings which have prompted thee to abandon this cloistral existence; and heaven hath not beheld unmoved this conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The reward is therefore thy freedom. Moreover, thy destiny demands that thou should'st be abroad in the great and busy world; for the celestial loveliness with which thou art endowed, was not bestowed upon thee to be concealed from the view of those whom it may charm and delight. It was given to thee as a blessing to thyself, and that it may bless the eyes of those who worship the Almighty through his works. And behold! thy destiny has ordained that thou shall bestow thy hand upon a hero whose admiration of thee shall amount to a devotion, and whose existence thou shalt render happy until the end." Having thus spoken, the angelic being vanished suddenly; and I slept on until the morning. But when I was awakened by the ringing of the convent-bell, I remembered my dream! and on the following night I fled from the precincts of that monastic gloom in which I had passed three years.'

Again did Gloria pause; and more timid, more affrighted than ever was the look which she now threw upon the countenance of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

He was wrapped in deep and absorbing thought; his elbow rested upon his knee, and his hand supported his brow, as he sate in an attitude of profound abstraction.

Gloria laid her hand gently upon his shoulder; he started, raised his head, turned his eyes quickly towards her, and perceived that her beauteous countenance wore an expression of mingled terror and surprise, as if of frightened innocence.

'I have offended you,' she said, in a tone of deep sadness.

'My God! no—oh! no—far from it!' exclaimed De Colmar, seizing her hand and pressing it warmly. 'It is impossible that you could offend me, Gloria; I conjure you not to entertain the thought for a moment! Pardon that air of reserve, of abstraction, which I wore for an instant; I will explain presently the nature of my reflections. But in the meantime proceed, dear lady, with your own narrative, for I am indeed profoundly interested therein.'

'You remember the night in the church?' said Gloria, a momentary abruptness marking the harmonious tones and musical modulation of her rich voice 'And now,' she continued, without waiting for a response, 'you may to some extent connect a portion of the scene which you then beheld with the explanations I have already given you. I allude to the renunciation of my vows as a votary of heaven! Upon no other incident of that dreadful night do I at present wish to dwell—save the circumstance of becoming acquainted with you,' she added, fixing upon De Colmar a look full of melting tenderness. 'And when you lavished upon me the most delicate attentions,' she continued—'when you declared that you wished to behold me again—when you thanked me with enthusiasm in your tone and with rapture in your manner for consenting to meet you on the rampart at Prague—and lastly, when you raised my hand to your lips, a strange presentiment sprang up in my soul. Some days passed, and we met in Prague according to appointment. Do you remember all that you said upon the occasion?'

'Yes; I blamed my rashness, my madness, for having sought that interview,' answered Sir Ernest de Colmar, 'because, as I observed to you, it would make me desirous to enjoy the pleasure of another meeting.'

'And when I proposed to leave you—when I wished to tear myself away,' continued Gloria, 'you besought me to remain, declaring that although you still repented, yet were you steeped as it were in happiness. And then you addressed me in a tone of enthusiasm which recalled to my mind the presentiment that had struck me on that night of adventures in the Taborite encampment; and your words, your manner, the whole expression of your countenance indicated an admiration and a worship. The presentiment was confirmed; at least, methought so at the

moment: and beholding in *you* the hero of whom the angel had prophesied in my dream, so sudden and overwhelming a tide of joy poured in unto my soul, that I fled to conceal an enthusiasm which I fancied it would be unmaidenly to betray. And now, Sir Knight,' added Gloria, her voice again sinking into a tone of timidity and her eyes once more bashfully seeking his countenance, 'you have heard all those explanations which I have deemed myself called upon to give.'

'And you tell me,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a low voice that expressed deeply concentrated emotions, 'you tell me, Gloria,' he repeated, fixing his looks mournfully upon her, 'that you were rejoiced at the thought that I was destined to become your husband.'

'Oh! never for a single instant have I ceased to treasure that hope in my mind,' exclaimed Gloria, fervently,—'since that day when on the ramparts of Prague your conduct appeared to confirm the presentiment which had previously sprung up in my soul!'

Earnestly and intently for some moments did the Knight gaze upon the countenance that was turned towards him: searchingly and scrutinizingly did he look into the depths of those large and lustrous orbs which threw glances of passion and tenderness upon him. But the expression of Gloria's features denoted timid innocence, hope mingled with suspense, the agitation that arose from the heart's fluttering; and guile was not depicted there!

Angry with himself for having allowed a suspicion, transitory though it were, to creep into his mind; and convinced that the beauteous being seated by his side was all ingenuousness, artlessness and candor, Sir Ernest de Colmar took her hand, saying, 'Gloria, I have inflicted upon thee an irreparable injury, and God alone can tell how acutely my soul is anguished at the thought!'

'An injury! *You*—an injury—upon me!' exclaimed the lovely creature, her countenance expressing amazement. 'What mean you?'

'I mean,' responded the knight,' 'that, dazzled by your charms on the first occasion when we met, I besought that second interview, which took place on the ramparts of yon city, and which filled me with a presentiment of evil at the time; I mean, Gloria, that the transcendent loveliness with which thou art invested, did so bewilder, enchant, and overpower me at the latter meeting, that it was no wonder if my tone, my words, and my countenance expressed an admiration approaching a worship; and I mean, also, that it was because I thus gave way to the ardor of my feelings and the enthusiasm of the moment, that I have inflicted an injury upon thee. Oh! rash, insane, inconsiderate conduct that it was! For I will not attempt to veil the truth from my eyes; I will look at it in the face as fearlessly as if it were a human enemy! And this truth is, Gloria, that you have bestowed your affections upon one who cennot return them ——'

'O heavens!' she exclaimed in a voice of anguish, while her features denoted that she was now in trembling expectation of hearing something fatal to her happiness.

'Yes, that is indeed the truth, Gloria!' cried De Colmar, his own voice indicating profound emotion. 'You have given your love where it cannot be reciprocated; you have shed the sunlight of your affections on a heart that is unable to reflect the beams! My God! it cuts me to the very soul to think that your peace of mind should be menaced by any imprudence on my part. I came hither this day in order that I might reveal a secret—a secret which will convince you how impossible it is for us to meet hereafter otherwise than as friends, and how much better it will be if we meet not again for a long time to come! Yes, Gloria, for this purpose did I keep the appointment which your note gave me for to-day——'

'And the secret that you refer to?' she murmured, turning aside her countenance: but the agitated swell of her snowy bosom proved how strong was the agitation that existed within.

'That secret, Gloria, is explained in a few words,' answered the knight: then, after a short pause, he added, Wherefore should I keep you in suspense? *For the secret is, that I love your sister Satanais!*'

An ejaculation from the lips of Gloria as this avowal fell upon her ears: but that ejaculation sounded to Sir Ernest de Colmar's comprehension rather as a cry of joy than of anguish. In this idea, however, he almost instantaneously saw that he must have been deceived, inasmuch as Gloria, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

The knight remained silent: for what consolation could he offer?

But the embarrassment of this scene was not destined to be of long continuance: for Gloria. suddenly starting to her feet, turned upon De Colmar a countenance in which tears and smiles, sorrow and joy, agitation and happiness were so singularly blended, that he was amazed and bewildered by an expression made up of such antagonistic emotions.

The words which Gloria immediately uttered, seemed to afford, however, a key to the solution of that enigma which her whole appearance presented at that moment.

'I trusted to a dream, and I was wrong,' she said, in a deep, melting tone. 'The delusion has vanished, and I now comprehend how foolish I have been. But in the depth of my disappointments, amidst the ruins of my hopes, there is yet a grand consolation. You love my sister. and should you become *her* husband, you will likewise become my brother. In that near degree of affinity may I enjoy your friendship, your esteem, your fraternal affection. These will suffice for me,' added Gloria, her features lighting up again with their wonted radiance; 'and I may yet hope to enjoy much happiness. In the meantime, Ernest, your secret is safe with me——'

'And not even to the ears of Satanais herself must you breathe it at present,' exclaimed the knight, infinitely rejoiced to behold the change which had come over the heavenly creature who stood before him.

'Oh! no, no!' she cried; 'for it can only be friendship which you dare proffer her until her doom be decided by the combat you have so generously undertaken to wage in her behalf. And in that combat,' added Gloria, relapsing into gravity, 'may all good angels attend upon thee!'

She paused, extended her hand, and suffered it to remain for nearly a minute in that of Sir Ernest de Colmar, while her eyes dwelt with unspeakable tenderness upon his countenance.

'In every lineament of your features,' she said at length, and speaking in a tone of deep sincerity, 'the noblest thoughts are written. Now that I am to regard you only as a brother, and that you must look upon me as a sister, I may be permitted to give utterance to those praises which your chivalrous character evokes from my heart. Farewell for the present, Ernest—farewell.'

And, pressing his hand warmly, she turned abruptly away, plunged into the green mazes of the wood, and was almost instantaneously lost to his view.

He stood for a few minutes gazing upon the spot where she had thus disappeared; then slowly recovering from the fit of abstraction into which he was thrown by the rapid review that he now took of the preceding scene, he retraced his steps into the city.

On reaching the Golden Falcon, Sir Ernest de Colmar summoned the two pages, Lionel and Konrad, to his presence, and addressed them in the following terms:

'You are both aware that the Captain-General of the Taborites is anxious to get the Princess Elizabetha of Bohemia into his power. But this must not be, for Austria is bound to afford her highness a refuge. That she is concealed somewhere in the vicinage of Prague is more than probable; and I therefore charge you both to institute searching but cautious inquiries with a view to discover the place of her abode. At the same time I warn you, gallant youths, that this task will be attended with danger, unless it be executed with circumspection and prudence; for the princess is watched by at least one individual, and perhaps by more, to whom any interference in her affairs may not prove welcome nor agreeable. Farther than this I am not permitted by circumstances to prompt you; but your intelligence, love of adventure, and desire to please me, will doubtless lead you on to success. And if successful, your reward shall not be inconsiderable.

The pages made a suitable answer, expressing their readiness to undertake the task thus confided to them; and when they had retired, Sir Ernest de Colmar sate down to pen despatches to the Lord High Chancellor of the Duchy of Austria.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHAMPION OF THE DAUGHTER OF SATAN.

It was the night of the 15th of August.

The weather was tempestuous and stormy; the wind swept in wild and frequent gusts through the city of Prague; and the darkness was so thick, so intense, that the atmosphere seemed to be one solid mass of something black and palpable.

The sentries stationed round the castle had just been relieved at eleven o'clock, as a warrior mounted on a grey charger, and dressed in a suit of bright steel armor, rode at a gentle pace along the streets leading to the eastern gate of the city.

But though his steed was of that light color, and his panoply was of the brightest polished metal, yet gleamed they not in the midst of the darkness, so profound it was.

On reaching the city gate, Sir Ernest de Colmar, for he was the warrior thus going forth armed by night, was challenged by the sentinels, who at once and peremptorily declared that he could not be permitted to leave Prague at that hour, and in such martial garb, without a special passport signed by General Zitzka.

Sir Ernest was prepared for this obstacle, and while affecting to remonstrate with the soldiers on the severity of the proceeding, he drew off his gauntlet and displayed the ring which the chief of the Taborites had given him, as the reader will remember, on the occasion when he sojourned at the encampment in the wood. The jewel flashed brightly in the glare of the torch which one of the men had brought forth from the guard-house, and the effect was instantaneous.

'Pass on,' said the officer on duty at that station; and Sir Ernest de Colmar, drawing on his gauntlet once more, rode through the gates.

His horse's hoofs clattered on the drawbridge; and then the sounds were continued in a more subdued manner along the road which traversed the eastern suburb. In a few minutes the outskirts of the city were passed; and the rude wind swept with a wilder note and a more gushing vehemence over the open country.

On went the dauntless warrior, bestriding the gallant steed that bore him so lightly although clad in that iron panoply; and the crimson plumes surmounting his helm streamed with loud flutterings in the gale.

His right hand held the long quivering lance which was so soon to bear its portion in the fray; his shield hung for the present at the saddle-bow; and to his side was suspended the huge cross-handled sword.

Thus armed—thus accoutred—thus protected at all points, did Sir Ernest de Colmar ride forth from the city of Prague to do battle for the Daughter of Satan! It was a night such as imagination would depict as well suited for a combat of this terrible nature; a night when the gushing wind made the murderer's corpse sway to and fro as it hung to the gallows-tree; when the churchyard resounded to those hollow moans which seemed the wail of damned spirits revisiting the spot where their mortal forms lay decomposing in humid graves—when oceans roared and rivers murmured as if with voices capable of menacing the brave mariner and mocking the drowning one—when even the mightiest towers and the loftiest battlements shook and quaked beneath the influence of the storm-wind—when the vast forest rustled from end to end with a sound as if a myriad horsemen were careering madly over fields of the ripe golden wheat—when the miser sate crouching over his hoards fearful lest every noise be the violence heralding the irruption of plunderers—when the flames waved to and fro, on the summit of Vesuvius and Ætna, like tongues of lurid fire thrust forth from the jaws of monstrous serpents; and when the criminal lay quailing on his sleepless couch, as if the voices of heaven were borne in appalling menace upon his ear by the wings of the tempest!

Such a night as this it was; a night which fancy would conceive as the fitting season when the murderer would lay in ambush for the solitary traveller; when the bones of the dead would rattle in the damp vaults of the church and the skeleton in the closet of the anatomist; when lawless banditti would assail the rural mansion, carrying fire, and death, and desolation into its halls; when the huge spectre of the Brocken would sit upon the summit of his craggy haunt and mingle the voice of his infernal mockery with the awful roar of the whirlwind; when the howling wolves would sweep in terror through the waving forest, and the savage jackal render night more hideous still with his cries imitative of human agonies; when the laboring ship would creak from stem to stern as if about to part with crashing din into a thousand pieces; when the cataract and the torrent would pour down with the violence and the din of an accumulated volume of water; and when the swollen river, breaking its embankment as a giant may snap straws asunder, would rush over the meadows and plains, carrying desolation to the farms and the hamlets, and sweeping away the cottagers homes

and their inmates in the mad career of an universal ruin!

Yes; it was such a night as the fiends would choose to quit their infernal homes and come upon the earth to enact their impious revels; when gholes would open the grave of the newly-buried dead, drag forth the ghastly corpse, and feast on its ice-cold flesh; when witches would brew the hell-broth that furnished them with power to work their charms and give effect to their diabolical incantations; and when murderers would behold the ghosts of their victims standing by the beds which no slumber could visit on such a night as this!

Still, in an easterly direction, did the brave Sir Ernest de Colmar ride leisurely along, putting up a prayer to heaven from time to time, and beseeching his guardian angel to carry him safely and triumphantly through the combat which he was about to dare.

And as he thus proceeded on his way he pictured to himself the splendid Satanais kneeling in the palace-chapel, and raising her voice in supplication to the throne of eternal grace; yes, in imagination did he behold her, prostrate before the altar, the straggling rays of the yellow taper oscillating between the dark beauty of the houri's up-turned face and the imaged countenance of the blessed Virgin; alone in that temple, her rich red lips apart, and the pearls glancing between, her eyes vibrating like stars in the shade, and shining with luminous brilliancy in the midst of the obscurity!

It was thus that the knight's fancy pictured Satanais afar off; and then, as his imagination still pursued the theme, he beheld her battling against the anguish of suspense and the poignancy of terror—now crossing her arms over her heaving bosom, then pressing her hands to her throbbing brows; now clasping those beauteous hands, and extending them in frantic appeal to heaven; then, with wildly flashing eyes, looking behind and on either side into the deep darkness, fearful lest some hideous form or terrible shape should come forth from the nave or from the aisles and proclaim her doom.

How versatile, inventive, and minute is the imagination, while pursuing some favorite theme. Thus was it with Sir Ernest de Colmar; for as his thoughts still remained fixed upon Satanais, he fancied that he now beheld her with her raven hair flowing all dishevelled over her bosom, her shoulders, and down her back, sweeping the marble steps of the altar as she knelt with bowed head there, and giving such an air of wildness to her looks that her wondrous beauty appeared alike terrible and sublime!

Thus thinking of her in whose cause he was about to do battle, and from time to time recommending himself to the care of heaven, the dauntless knight rode on.

And now the density of the darkness began to mitigate somewhat, and the sky could be seen stretching like an over-arching sheet of lead. The trees by the road side appeared to stand slowly forth, like objects blacker than the obscurity; and the grey steed gleamed, and the knight's steel armor shone faintly, making horse and man look like a spectral centaur moving along the road. Thus did things hither veiled in so deep a gloom, become partially visible, while the gale abated its wild violence.

Presently Sir Ernest de Colmar merged from the broad road, which swept abruptly off to the left, upon a dreary heath, where the stunted shrubs wore sinister shapes, and the ground rose in many places into craggy masses.

Here he paused, having calculated that he had already ridden full three quarters of an hour.

Dismounting from his steed, he fell upon his knees, and put up to heaven a last and fervent prayer, preparatory to the tremendous conflict that was now at hand.

Then, rising from his suppliant posture, he tightened the girths of the saddle, fastened the vizor of his helmet, tried all the plates of his armor, to assure himself that the steel panoply was in fitting order, braced his shield on his left arm, loosened the sword in its scabbard, grasped the spear in his right hand, and once more mounted his gallant charger.

O Satanais! at that moment the hero thought of thee; and behind his barred aventayle his lips murmured thy name!

But scarcely was the word thus spoken, when the sounds of a horse's hoofs came upon his ear; nearer and more near the din approached; and, in a few moments, a mighty form, clad in armor dark as jet and mounted on a colossal steed of coal-black hue, emerged rom the obscurity.

Not an instant was to be lost, for the enemy came careering on; and Sir Er-

nest de Colmar, couching his lance and dashing the rowels into the sides of his charger, was borne suddenly forward with the speed of the whirlwind.

Then, quick as the eye could wink, the warriors met in thundering shock!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HEATH.

Yes, dread was the collision; and the very earth appeared to reel beneath the hoofs of the mighty steeds; while the clang of the spears on the shields of the combatants sounded with similar metallic din over the heath.

But the conflict was decided in a moment; for, whereas the lance of Sir Ernest de Colmar was shivered against the buckler of his adversary, the stronger and stouter weapon wielded by the latter stood the violence of the tremendous shock and bore the knight from his charger.

Heavily fell the champion of the Daughter of Satan, and senseless he lay upon the ground, while his frightened steed dashed madly away and disappeared in the surrounding darkness.

From his own colossal black charger sprang the conqueror; and, bending over Sir Ernest de Colmar's prostrate form, he unfastened and raised the knight's barred vizor. The fresh air brought back signs of vitality to the vanquished champion's cheeks; his lips quivered, although no word came forth, and slowly and languidly he opened his eyes.

Then the dread victor in the coal-black armor fetched a small phial from a pouch hanging to the saddle of his horse; and returning to the Austrian knight, who was still unable to move, though consciousness was coming back, he poured the contents of the bottle down De Colmar's throat. A warm and thrilling glow instantaneously suffused itself throughout his entire frame; and the powers of memory reviving as suddenly as the physical energies, he comprehended in a moment where he was, how he came thither, the defeat which he had sustained, and the appalling consequences!

For now, with the vividness of the lightning flash darted athwart his soul the words of Satanais—those words which said, 'If heaven should desert thee and the power of hell should triumph in this combat, then must thou either yield an assent to any conditions which the Enemy of Mankind may choose to dictate; or else he will be enabled to claim thee as his own, bear thee away from earth and all its enjoyments, and plunge thee into the unknown but terrible depths of his fiery realms!'

The pouring of the cordial down De Colmar's throat, the sudden flaming up of the smouldering embers of memory, and the wild sweep of these startling recollections through his brain, all passed in much less than a minute; the resuscitation of life, the consciousness of defeat, and the sense of an appalling peril to his immortal soul, were thus pressed into one of those infinitesimal particles of time which show how an age of anguish and of torture may be endured while the eye is winking thrice or the heart is heaving and sinking with a single respiration!

And over De Colmar bent the dread being in his armor dark as jet, with the sable plumage waving above his helmet, and the vizor closed upon his countenance.

Then, from behind that barred aventayle,—from within that black helmet, as from the depths of a cavern in the bosom of a rock—came a voice which sounded fearful in its deep sonorous tones upon the ear of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Thou art mine, O presumptuous warrior!' said the terrible conqueror; 'and 'tis by thine own act that thou hast made thyself over to me, body and soul. Alike in the immortal spirit and the mortal flesh hast thou become the spoil and booty, the reward and trophy of my conquest. For 'twas *love* and not mere *friendship* which prompted thee to take upon thyself the championship of that woman whom I endowed with all the dark splendor and midnight glory of a supernal beauty. And as love is a passion containing much of selfishness, the impulse derived therefrom made thy cause weak, and thou wast conquered; whereas, hadst thou been influenced only by friendship, which is a feeling unalloyed with aught of the dross of human nature, thou would'st have proved victorious. But I made Satanais transcendently lovely even from her birth, in order that she should never inspire the colder and purer sentiment of *friendship*, but invariably excite the enthusiasm of admiration or the ardor of *love*. Thus was I

assured of frustrating the alternative which permitted her salvation of my power to be effected by means of the votary of friendship.'

'Then I am lost, irretrievably lost, body and soul!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he lay prostrate and helpless upon the heath; for even when he essayed to make the sign of the cross, his arms remained without movement, and his fingers rigid in the gauntlets, and a sense of stupendous terror hushed the first word of prayer which he sought to breathe.

'No, you are not irretrievably lost,' said the stern conqueror. 'There are conditions, by the acceptance and fulfilment of which thou may'st escape the doom thy rashness has sought.'

'Conditions!' ejaculated Sir Ernest de Colmar, the dread shuddering which had at first seized upon his entire being, now suddenly changing into a species of joyous ecstacy; for he saw that all hope was not lost, and in his mind sprang up the generous aspiration of yet saving Satanais from the power of the Evil One.

'Silence, and hear me out!' said the sable conqueror, whose voice rolled like a muffled drum or distant thunder upon the knight's ears. 'And marvel not if I can even at this moment penetrate thy thoughts, which are reflected back to her in whose behalf thou didst madly rush upon the path of danger. Know, then, that by the accomplishment of those terms which I am about to dictate, thou may'st not only release thyself from the power which thy defeat this night has given me over thee, body and soul, but thou wilt likewise appease me with regard to my claim upon Satanais.'

'Thy words, O Satan, fill me with mingled rejoicing and terror,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar; 'for while they encourage hope in my soul, they make me tremble lest the conditions thou hast to propose should be such as I dare not dream of accepting.'

''Tis for you rather than for me to estimate the respective value of those alternatives between which your destiny is balanced,' answered the sable conqueror, his voice sounding like the hollow wind of December. 'In the first place, I stipulate that within seven days you take your departure from Prague, and that you return to Vienna. Secondly, I enjoin that you behold Satanais no more. Thirdly, I command that you conduct Gloria to the Austrian capital. And, fourthly, I require that all interference on your part in the affairs of Bohemia shall cease for a period of one year from the present date.'

'Are those the terms on which thou wilt spare me and resign all claim to Satanais!' cried Sir Ernest de Colmar, his amazement scarcely equalling his joy, for it was the diplomacy of a man rather than the savage ferocity of a demon which appeared to have dictated the conditions specified. 'Every detail thou hast named, O Satan,' continued the knight, 'may be accomplished without dishonor to my reputation or danger to my soul; save and except,' he added, a sudden thought striking him, 'that desire which thou hast expressed with regard to Gloria. For is she not devoted to the service of heaven?'

'Heaven hath released her from the vows which were made for her by her late parents, as well as from those which she pledged with her own lips,' was the response.

'But I know not where she dwells, nor when I may be enabled to see her again,' said the knight. 'Moreover, I should hesitate to carry her off by force; and it is not probable that any affairs of her own will lead her to demand at my hands an escort to Vienna.'

'Trouble not thyself upon this head,' exclaimed the dread being. 'Thou wilt have to perpetrate no outrage in order to make Gloria thy companion to the Austrian capital. For the rest, the conditions please thee well?'

'I accept them cheerfully,' replied Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'But Satanais ——'

'Did she not tell thee that some superhuman intention would make her acquainted with the results of this combat?' interrupted the sable conqueror. 'Already have mysterious presentiments warned her of all that has occurred within the last few minutes upon this heath; *the knell sounded in her heart* when thou wast hurled from thy steed, but now *the hymn of rejoicing and thanksgiving is raising its music to her soul!*'

'Thou dost quote her own words,' said the knight, a fearful shudder passing through his frame as he received this proof of the superhuman knowledge of the dread being who still bent over him as he lay upon the spot where he had fallen; for there was something awful and overwhelming in the thought that he was in such close contact with that immortal Lucifer who dared to

raise the brand of war against the Archangel, and wield the gleaming glaive in defiance of the Majesty of Heaven!

A faintness came over the knight; a langnor weighed down his eye-lids; and he felt a lethargy growing upon him which he could not shake off. Consciousness was ebbing away once more—a palsy was fastening on his senses. The form of his terrible conqueror appeared to dilate into more colossal proportions, and to assume a shape and bulk more tremendously appalling. Sir Ernest closed his eyes to shut out the dread object; and then, while feeling as if a somnolent numbness were shedding its influence over him, he heard the clanking of the armor and the trampling of the impatient steed as the sable warrior mounted the coal-black animal. Another moment; and the din of the galloping horse's hoofs fell upon his ears; and ere the sounds had died away in the distance, De Colmar's senses once more abandoned him altogether.

When he awoke to consciousness again, a female form was bending over him; but although the moon was now peeping forth from amidst the heavy curtains of the sky, he could not immediately distinguish the countenance that looked down upon his own. The thought which first flashed to his mind and sent a thrill of pleasure through his heart, was that it was Satanais; but there was light sufficient to show him that the face was too fair to be her's; and then he imagined that it must be Gloria. Scarcely, however, was this latter idea formed, when the female spoke; and, although her voice was harmonious with the sweet melody of youthfulness, yet it was softer and more silvery in its tone than that of the Daughter of Glory.

'Are you wounded, Sir Knight?' she inquired, in an accent denoting a kind and generous interest. 'Alas! I fear that you are, for the fragments of a spear upon the ground bear dread and unmistakeable testimony to some recent conflict.'

'Thanks! a thousand thanks. fair unknown, for your humane solicitude,' said De Colmar, raising himself partially up and resting on his elbow. 'No, I am not wounded, but sorely bruised; for, as you surmise, this spot has proved the scene of a combat in which my lance broke, and my adversary unhorsed me.'

'Your steed, then, has doubtless wandered away, Sir Knight?' observed the female; 'for when I first discovered you lying upon the ground, there was no horse near.'

'That animal is, then, your own?' said De Colmar, now perceiving a steed close by.

'It is, Sir Knight, and at your service to bear you either to your own home, or else to the nearest habitation. But if the information which I have received be correct,' she added, 'Prague can be at no great distance hence.'

'Three quarters of an hour's gentle riding,' answered De Colmar, now feeling himself so far recovered as to be able to regain his feet. 'How long have you been thus kindly watching me, fair unknown?' he inquired.

'Nearly ten minutes,' was the response. 'I endeavored to remove your helmet, but knew not how to unfasten it. Fortunately I had a flask of water in the saddle-bag, and by sprinkling your countenance I succeeded in recovering you,' added the young female, in a tone of modest bashfulness.

'Accept my sincerest thanks,' exclaimed De Colmar; 'and in return for your kindness, permit me to offer my services in any way where they may be useful. For meseems that you are travelling alone, unfriended, and at dangerous hours——But, great heaven! is it possible?' he cried, in a sudden transport of astonishment, as the moon came out with increased power and threw its silver beams full upon the countenance of the young female, thus revealing traits of the sweetest expression and lineaments of the most perfect classical beauty.

'What mean you, Sir Knight?' demanded the trembling girl, startled by his abrupt ejaculation, and fearing that he either saw something terrible in the semi-obscurity which curtained the heath, or else that he experienced the pang of a wound unsuspected before.

'Yes, it is indeed the same!' he cried, not heeding her question; 'I could not forget so sweet a countenance. Once seen, it were impossible to pass away from the memory.'

And now, as the young female saw that the warrior's eyes were fixed intently upon her face, she cast down her looks and blushed deeply, although there was a noble frankness in his bearing, and an unmistakeable ingenuousness in his manner, which forbade her

from entertaining any apprehension of insult or harm at his hands.

'Pardon me, fair maiden,' he said, 'for not immediately explaining the cause of the sudden astonishment which seized upon me, when the moonbeams favored me with a more perfect view of your countenance. But this is indeed a singular encounter; and in succoring me upon a lonely heath, you have amply requited a service which a few weeks ago I was fortunate enough to render you in a dark forest.'

'Oh! I comprehend you now, Sir Knight,' exclaimed the young female, partaking of the surprise from which he himself had scarcely recovered. 'You are the generous warrior who rescued me from the power of Lord Rodolph.'

'Lord Rodolph!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'What! was he the ruffian who carried you off that night, and with whom I measured swords in the forest? Ah! that accounts for his inhospitable treatment of me afterwards, while I sojourned a few hours at Altendorf Castle. He recognised me again, and to vent his cowardly spite upon me, he appropriated as my lodging those long disused rooms——But no matter now!' cried Sir Ernest, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of his audible musings.—'Tell me, charming Angela—for I have not forgotten the name by which the worthy forest-keeper and his wife spoke of thee as their much-loved adopted daughter--tell me, I say, wherefore art thou travelling thus far away from thy rural home, and all unprotected and friendless? Has misfortune overtaken the good Wildon? has death deprived you of those who cherished you so fondly?'

'No, Sir Knight,' answered Angela, in a tone which was tremulous with emotion; 'my adopted parents are alive, thank heaven! and in the same circumstances as when you saw them. To accomplish an object of high importance am I journeying to Prague; and——'

But the maiden stopped suddenly short, for she recollected that the position of the knight was perfectly unknown to her; he might be a friend of the Taborites, and consequently an enemy of the three nobles whom Zitzka had incarcerated; and therefore she instantly perceived how imprudent it would be to drop even the remotest hint of the object of her mission to the Bohemian capital.

'Fair Angela,' said De Colmar, perceiving that she had suddenly checked herself when on the point of entering into some explanation, 'I seek not to pry into your affairs; I scorn the idea of entertaining a vulgar and impertinent curiosity. You act wisely in observing caution towards strangers; and in yon city whither you are bound, you will have need of all your self-possession, forethought, and prudence; for in Prague at this moment there are many jarring interests, perhaps many covert intrigues; and at all events that secret ferment which is produced by a crushed aristocracy endeavoring in its desperation to regain power and influence from a dominant democracy. Keep, therefore, your own counsel, maiden; unbosom not a single secret unnecessarily—seek neither assistance nor advice of strangers; and, by thus acting, you will avoid many dangers.'

Angela had not time to express her gratitude for these excellent recommendations; for scarcely had the concluding words fallen from De Colmar's lips, when the sounds of a prancing steed came over the heath, nearer and nearer with great rapidity; and, in a few moments, the knight's runaway horse cantered up to the spot.

'It is mine!' exclaimed Sir Ernest the instant that the animal emerged from the surrounding obscurity; and as he caressed the charger with his gauntletted hand, he said, "Now we may as well proceed in the direction of Prague; that is, fair Angela, if you will accept of my escort.'

'Cheerfully and thankfully,' responded the maiden, in her characteristic tone of hearty frankness; and, as she thus spoke, she mounted her own steed with remarkable agility, just as the knight was about to offer his assistance.

'You are no indifferent equestrian, Angela,' he observed, as he slowly ascended to his saddle; for he was suffering with the pain of the severe contusions experienced by his fall in the combat, as well as from the exhausting effects of the two occasions on which he had suffered a total privation of consciousness.

'Ten days have elapsed since I left my forest home,' said the maiden, with an audible sigh; 'and I am well aware that four at the outside should have brought me to Prague. But I have been fearful to journey after dusk of an evening; and moreover, not a day has passed without seeing me wander out of the direct road, alike through inexperience in travel and from the inac-

curate instructions which I received from ignorance in some cases and from wilful misrepresentation in others. Occasionally, too, I have been necessitated to tarry some hours at a time, at a wayside village or hamlet, in order to avail myself of the escort of the first company of travellers passing in the same direction—the disturbed condition of particular districts, or the evil repute of certain forests rendering it unsafe for solitary individuals, especially defenceless women, to traverse those tracts by themselves. Thus your Excellency perceives that my journey was long, tedious, and even perilous at intervals.'

'But how came you to be travelling so late to-night, alone, and across this barren heath?' inquired De Colmar, as he and his fair companion now rode along at a somewhat brisk pace.

'I will tell your excellency,' said Angela, slightly reining in her steed, so that she could converse without inconvenience. 'At about five o'clock in the evening of the day which is just passed —for it is now the morning of another— I reached a small hamlet, where I halted at the inn. My intention was to remain there for the night; and the landlady welcomed me with great kindness. A repast was spread, and I was partaking of some refreshment in company with the woman and her husband when a priest entered. He addressed the landlord and his wife in terms which indicated that he was well known at the house, and they received him with great attention and respect. He sate down to table and ate with us. In the course of conversation he observed that he should remain at the inn for the night, and proceed to Prague on the morrow, as it was dangerous to cross the heath after dusk. The landlady informed him that I was likewise bound for the capital, whereupon the holy father surveyed me with more attention, and his cowl falling completely back, it struck me that I had seen his face before. I know not how it was, but a presentiment of evil came slowly into my mind; and this idea augmented to a positive uneasiness when I began to notice that the priest regarded me fixedly and furtively as often as he thought that I was not noticing him. The repast being over, and the landlord and lady having quitted the room, his reverence, who had hitherto scarcely addressed a word to me, began to converse in a free and apparently friendly manner; and, dexterously introducing the name of Altendorf Castle, he instantly took notice of the sudden manner in which I gave an involuntary start. I was now certain that he knew me or something about me, and that he had made a particular remark in order to assure himself that I was indeed the person he supposed me to be. Then, with the vividness of an inspiration did a remembrance flash to my mind, suggesting where and under what circumstances this priest might have seen me before. For I must now inform you that at the commencement of the present month Lord Rodolph caused me to be seized and conveyed to Altendorf Castle; and it was when his cowardly servitors were conducting me into the hall of the feudal mansion, that I caught a glimpse of a priest who was coming forth from the chapel. He paused to gaze upon me, and I appealed to him, but vainly, to intercede with Lord Rodolph in my behalf. He only smiled, methought even insolently, and turned away. That same priest it was,' added Angela, 'whom I met this evening at the village hamlet.'

'Did not the landlady or landlord address him by any name?' inquired De Colmar.

'They called him Father Cyprian,' was the response.

'Father Cyprian!' ejaculated the knight. 'I know him well, and have myself good cause to complain of his treachery.'

'Ah! then my own misgivings were not perhaps unfounded!' exclaimed Angela. 'But to proceed with my narrative, I need scarcely inform your excellency that when I recognised in Father Cyprian the same priest whom I had seen, and to whom I had vainly addressed myself for succor at Altendorf Castle, I experienced an alarm which must have betrayed itself in my countenance; for his reverence immediately said, with a significant look, "We are not altogether unknown to each other. But fear nothing; I would rather save than injure you; and to-morrow you shall proceed under my escort to Prague." I surveyed him with astonishment, wonderin; how he would dare venture in his ecclesiastical garb amongst the Taborites who hold possession of the capital. "I understand that look of surprise," he observed with a smile; "but to-morrow morning you will behold me disguised in such a manner that my own mother, were she alive, would not recognise me." I made

no answer, and after a few moments' silence he inquired what were my intentions in visiting Prague—whether I had any friends residing there—and, if not, where I proposed to take up my abode. Evading his first query, as well as I was able, I answered the two others by stating that I had no acquaintances in the Bohemian capital, at whose dwelling I could seek an asylum. He then began to expatiate upon the benevolence and charity of a certain noble lady with whom he was acquainted, and who possesses a splendid mansion in the vicinity of Prague—a lady to whose care he proposed to introduce me, accompanying his offer with an assurance that I should be welcomed cordially and affectionately.'

'Did he mention the lady's name?' inquired De Colmar, a strange suspicion suddenly flashing to his mind.

'No,' responded Angela; 'and before I had time to give him any answer, or even express my thanks for his kindness,—of which it was not, however, my intention to avail myself,—an old woman of respectable appearance entered the room with a bundle in her hand. The priest immediately rose and beckoned her out of the apartment. Feeling wearied with my day's journey, and anxious to avail myself of this opportunity to escape any farther questioning on the part of his Reverence, I ascended to the chamber which had been prepared for me. But scarcely had I entered it and closed the door behind me, when I heard voices conversing in an adjacent room; and, the partition being very thin, I could not possibly help catching a portion of the discourse that passed between them. "*I have brought you the disguise, holy father,*" said a female voice, "*and likewise the juice for your complexion.*" "*Good!*" exclaimed another voice, which I instantly recognised to be that of the priest; "*but have you brought me any tidings of her whom I seek so diligently?*" "*Yes,*" answered the old woman, for I have no doubt that it was she; "*my researches have not been in vain. Sister Marietta is in Prague, and your vengeance may be accomplished.*"'

Sir Ernest de Colmar actually bounded in his saddle as these words, related by Angela, met his ears; for the scene in the church near the Taborite encampment flashed to his memory, reminding him that Sister Marietta was none other than the Daughter of Glory. But Angela perceived not, in the obscurity of the night, how great was the effect produced upon the Austrian warrior by that portion of her narrative; and she continued in the following manner:—

'Upon receiving the intelligence which the old woman had thus communicated to him, Father Cyprian gave vent to an ejaculation of delight; and then the discourse was continued in low whispers for some minutes. At length I heard the old woman say,—"*And if your Reverence should succeed in getting Sister Marietta into your power, what is to be her punishment?*" "*How can you ask, Dame Martha?*" cried Father Cyprian, in a tone of stern remonstrance; "*you who are one of the sworn servitors to the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue!*" Then the whispering was resumed, and I overheard no more. Nor, indeed had they continued to speak in an audible tone, would their words have been understood by me; for a vertigo had seized upon my brain, and a thousand objects of terror rose up to my imagination.'

'Wherefore were you thus stricken with alarm?' asked Sir Ernest de Colmar, already suspecting what the response would be.

'Because in the words which had last met my ears, there seemed to be an allusion to something so terrible,' said the young maiden, 'something so vaguely appalling in its dim significancy——'

'I understand you, fair Angela!' exclaimed the knight. 'You are no stranger to the mysteries and horrors of Altendorf Castle?'

'What! is it possible that *you* also have seen——'

But she checked herself abruptly in the midst of a sentence full of excitement; for a sudden reminiscence sealed her lips relative to any allusions which were calculated to lead her on to utter a word concerning the White Lady.

'Angela,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a tone of deep solemnity, 'I have indeed traversed those winding corridors and dark, damp rooms which lie beneath the right wing of Altendorf Castle: I have gazed with admiration, and wonder, and awe upon the Bronze Statue, and I have recoiled in dread horror from the contemplation of that infernal mechanism which reveals its ghastly aspect in the stone chamber below. Full well, therefore, can I understand the alarm which seized upon you

when even the slightest allusion to those tremendous mysteries fell upon your ears.'

'Yes, for a few instants overwhelming indeed was that alarm,' exclaimed Angela; 'for although I comprehended not the allusion, and although not even the wildest of my conjectures can afford a clue to the real object of that Statue, or the real use of that machinery, nevertheless, in my soul there is a deep conviction that both are connected with some awful rites or terrible ceremonies, if not with enormities from the nature of which the imagination recoils shudderingly and in dismay. But while the old woman and Father Cyprian were continuing their discourse in low whispers, I recalled my scattered thoughts and paralysed energies; and, impelled by some secret influence or presentiment which prompted me to escape from the vicinage of the priest, I descended from my chamber, ordered my horse to be saddled forthwith, rewarded the landlady of the tavern for her attentions, and resumed my journey towards the Bohemian capital. I have now explained to you, Sir Knight, how it is that I undertook to cross the dreary heath alone and during the darkness of a stormy night.'

'And from your remarks, fair maiden,' said De Colmar, 'I conclude that you have no fixed destination in Prague. The Golden Falcon, at which hostel I myself am residing, is kept by a worthy couple named Templin, and they have a daughter about your own age. Does it please your fancy that I should commend you to the care of these good people?'

'For the remainder of this night, at all events,' replied Angela; 'and I tender you my gratitude for so much courteous attention on the part of your Excellency.'

'Nay, give me no thanks for so poor a service, fair maiden,' said the knight; 'remember the amount of obligation I owe to you for having stayed your steps awhile to succor me as I lay senseless upon the heath. But we will now press forward at a quicker pace.'

De Colmar and Angela accordingly urged their steeds into a smart canter, and in a quarter of an hour they reached the city gate. At first they were refused admittance by the Taborite sentinel, who pleaded that his instructions were peremptory not to suffer any unknown armed warrior to enter Prague by night without a special permit from the Captain-General. But the display of the glittering ring on De Colmar's finger, as another soldier came forth from the guard room with a torch in his hand, produced an immediate effect, and, the interdiction being as courteously withdrawn as it was summarily asserted, the knight and his fair companion passed into the city.

Without farther molestation they pursued their way to the Golden Falcon; and the worthy landlady being summoned from her chamber, to which she had retired hours before, Angela was consigned to her care.

Sir Ernest de Colmar then repaired to his own suite of apartments; but on traversing the chamber appropriated to the use of Konrad and Lionel, he observed that the two couches were unoccupied, and it instantly struck the knight that they were probably absent on the mission which he had entrusted to them some days back relative to the Princess Elizabetha.

Unassisted, therefore, was he compelled to lay aside his armor; and when this somewhat difficult task was accomplished, he retired to rest. Extreme weariness soon wooed the presence of slumber; but in his visions did he behold the renewal of that dread scene which had occurred upon the heath.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FAREWELL.

Sir Ernest de Colmar dreamt, we say, that he was again in the midst of the wild and desolate waste, combatting with the Enemy of Mankind. All the details of that fearful event passed in phantasmagorian array through his mind; every word which his sable conqueror had then uttered was now repeated again in his ears; nor less did his meeting with the beauteous Angela occupy its proper place in this long and exciting vision.

But suddenly he awoke, or else it seemed to him that he awoke; and, to his boundless surprise, mingled with an ineffable joy, he beheld Satanais seated by the side of his bed, her splendid countenance bending over him with an expression of the most touching melancholy and plaintive tenderness.

The lamp which the knight had left burning upon the table threw its mellow gleam upon those magnificent features,

which were so deeply impressed upon his heart; the raven hair hung all dishevelled, in heavy tresses, over her shoulders, and a simple robe of sable dye and plain material loosely clothed her form. Upon her brow no diamonds shone—upon her dress no pearls were seen; like a lovely penitent was she—and yet as grandly beautiful as when arrayed in velvet, and with the gems glistening star-like amidst her hair, and the pearls tracing the rich outlines of her glowing form.

Though dark her complexion, yet was it bright with that transparent polish which bronzed, as it were, the pure olive of her skin; so that her high and noble forehead shone as if with sublimest thoughts; and her superb bosom rose in dazzling contrast with the sable drapery that only half concealed it.

Through the liquid jet of her magnificent eyes flashed a look of mingled joy and gratitude, as she met the glance of the awakening knight; and Love—the rose-winged deity—shed a livelier carnation on her cheeks of velvet smoothness, and agitated with a deeper emotion the bosom of sculptural richness.

'Satanais, is it indeed thou?' murmured De Colmar in a low tone; for there was something awe-inspiring and solemnly mysterious in the presence of the dark houri at that still hour, when the world slept, and night's sable curtains were drawn over the earth.

''Tis I, so lately called the Daughter of Satan, but now Satan's Own no longer,' she responded, with a deep pathos in the golden tones, which flowed in such rich harmony upon the warrior delighted ears. 'Thanks to thee, my generous-hearted benefactor, I am redeemed from the appalling influence which surrounded me like a plague-mist. In this homely garb of penitence, upon my knees at the foot of the altar in the palace-chapel, did I pour forth my soul in prayer for thee! And when a secret inspiration told me that thou wast worsted in the awful conflict, my brain burned with the maddening heat of the volcano, and my soul was rent with the anguish of a thousand martyrdoms.

'But in a few minutes a blessed change came over me; gleams of ecstatic feeling penetrated into my heart like the glimmering of dawn upon night's tempest-troubled ocean; and a secret voice hymned the pœan of salvation in my soul! Yes, I am saved—I am redeemed; and 'tis thou who hast rescued me from the tremendous thraldom that made me the Daughter of Satan. I have sought thee, therefore, to pour forth into thine ears the gratitude of my fervent heart, and bless thee for this great good which thou hast done! Ere the first beams of morning tinge with their roseate hue the eastern sky, I shall be on my way to the far-off clime of my birth. Thither does my destiny impel me—heaven alone can tell for what purpose, or to accomplish what aim! Certain and sure, however, it is that on earth we shall meet no more; for that superhuman guidance which hath permitted me to visit thee now for a few minutes, decrees likewise that it is for the last time!'

Her voice became low and tremulous as she uttered these words,—words which were wafted by the fragrant breath from between the moist red lips, like the soft tones of an Æolian harp oscillating on the balmy zephyr that plays amongst roses.

'For the last time!' said De Colmar, repeating the concluding phrase of her sentence, his voice catching the infection of the plaintive tenderness which animated her own. 'Yes, for the last time, and never, never shall we meet again in this life! But even now, beloved lady; for, my God! you *are* beloved, is it not in violation of my compact with Satan that I am blessed with thy presence? did he not enjoin me to behold thee no more?'

'Fear nothing on that head, Ernest, dear Ernest,' replied Satanais, her lustrous looks remaining rivetted upon his countenance in one long burning gaze of fondness, 'this last visit is permitted by a power superior to that which in all other respects became the arbiter of the conditions binding you with solemn compact. 'Tis not you who violate that compact now; for you have sought me not; 'tis I who have sought you in a spirit of gratitude, and friendship, and devotion, and love!'

'Oh! talk not to me of love, Satanais,' exclaimed De Colmar, with bitterness in his tone, 'for scarcely have I felt its delicious influence, when it turns into disappointment! It seemed to me a little while ago, until the combat of this fatal night, that some unknown harp was making soft music in my soul; but now the silver chord has been rudely snapped, and that entrancing melody is hushed for ever! Yes, I have loved thee, Satanais—still love thee,' continued the knight, in a low

but earnest tone, 'and it was because I loved thee that the Enemy of Mankind obtained his power to triumph over me in the conflict! The strength of my heart's passion became the weakness whereby I was vanquished; the ecstatic bliss of heaven gave me up as a victim to the domination of hell. Oh! this is the torture of blighted hope; this is the crucifixion of disappointment! And were it not for the grand solace imparted by the conviction that thou art saved, I should hold life so cheap as to be scarcely worth defending if menaced by danger. Thou goest away, Satanais, to thy far-off clime—thou leavest the wild forests of Bohemia for the flowers and the fragrant groves of thine own native land; and may the blessings of all good angels attend upon thee! But when thou art gone, all will be dark and cheerless for me!'

'Not so,' answered the houri, in a tone that was deep with meaning and with a look that was melting with fondness, 'earth has yet bright hopes and golden prospects for thee! Thou sayest that thy love has been given to me; thou wilt not, therefore, refuse the boon which I am about to demand at thy hands?'

'Adored and worshipped being,' said De Colmar, 'name thy wish, and fear not for a moment that I shall fail to perform it, even though at the sacrifice of my life!'

'It is destined that thou art to overwhelm me with priceless obligations,' returned Satanais. 'But the boon I seek at thine hands is comparatively light and trifling after the risk of body and soul which thou hast so recently incurred on my account. For what I have now to demand of thee is that thou wilt accord thy protection and friendship to my beloved sister Gloria. The same inscrutable destiny which compels me to quit Europe and return to my native clime in the far-off orient, ordains that she shall not by my companion. The promptings of that secret inspiration which renders us each alike obedient to the decrees of our fate, impel me in one direction and Gloria in another. We are doomed to sever from each other; the orphan sisters must separate and enter upon different paths; and the Almighty alone can tell whether those ways will ever lead to the same point, so that Satanais and Gloria may meet again! But if thou, Ernest, will grant my unfriended sister thy friendship and brotherly affection—if thou wilt do this for the love of me: oh! then shall I depart with comparative cheerfulness in my soul; or, at all events, with one pang the less!'

'I swear to perform all that thou hast demanded of me!' exclaimed the knight, struck by the wondrous manner in which the condition imposed upon him by Satan relative to Gloria was already working out its own fulfilment.

'Ten thousand thanks, my noble-hearted Ernest!' said the dark houri, in a tone of enthusiastic gratitude. 'To-morrow, at mid-day, in some grove by the side of the river, to which thine instinct will lead thee, *there* shalt thou meet Gloria, and she will make known her wishes to thee. And now Earnest dear Earnest, farewell—farewell for ever!'

Thus speaking in a tremulous tone, Satanais bent over the knight as he lay in his couch, and imprinted a burning kiss upon his forehead. Another moment, and he stretched out his arms to snatch her to his breast and fold her in a fond embrace; but see eluded his grasp, and gathering up a black mantle which lay upon the chair, she hastily threw the sable garment around her,—fixed upon him one long, last, lingering look of ineffable love, and then disappeared from the apartment.

At the very same instant, the flame of the lamp expired in its socket; and silence and darkness surrounded Sir Ernest de Colmar with a sense of utter loneliness.

Wondering whether he was really awake or asleep and dreaming, he sate up in his couch, pressed his hand to his forehead, to steady his thoughts, and gave way to the reflections that crowded in upon his mind But the longer he meditated upon the scene which had just occurred, the more bewildered he grew and the less confident did he become in regarding it as a substantial fact instead of a freak of the imagination. At length his mind experienced a sense of such complete weariness and exhaustion that he lay down to repose again; and slumber speedily fell upon him, dreamless now and deep.

When he awoke at a somewhat late hour, the sun was shining gloriously through the windows of his chamber; and a gentle breeze fanned his feverish countenance. He rose, and observed that one of the casements, which unfolded doorwise, was standing partly open. Having hastily thrown on his apparel, Sir Ernest proceeded to exa-

mine that portion of the garden which immediately joined the window; and on the soil he discovered the slight imprints of the long narrow feet of a female. Then he knew that the incident which was uppermost in his mind was not a dream; for he remembered it was in the direction of this open casement that Satanais had disappeared from his view at the instant the lamp went out.

Proceeding to the chamber belonging to his two pages, he found that it was empty and that neither couch therein had been disturbed during the night.—The prolonged absence of the youths alarmed him, still he cherished the hope that no danger had befallen them, but that they were merely engaged in following up some trace which they had probably discovered in respect to the abode of the Princess Elizabetha. He was, however, anxious for their return, not only to obtain the assurance that they were involved in no peril, but likewise that he might command them to desist from any farther research relative to the princess, one of the conditions dictated by his sable conqueror being a cessation on his part of all interference in the affairs of Bohemia.

Having performed his toilet and partaken of some refreshment, Sir Ernest de Colmar sent for the landlady of the Golden Falcon to inquire through her whether Angela required his services in any way, or wished to consult him upon any subject. But to his surprise he learnt that the maiden had risen at an early hour and had gone forth into the city, without even intimating when it was probable she should return.

Sir Ernest de Colmar was sorely depressed in spirits; never in his life had his manly soul been so completely weighed down by the leaden load of despondency. Vanquished by his terrible enemy on the preceding night, subjected to conditions which were even more than humiliating in many respects, compelled to abandon all idea of ever beholding Satanais again, and full of apprehensions on account of his two faithful pages, he felt as if misfortunes were suddenly crowding in around him.

It was, therefore, with a heavy heart that he slowly traversed the city and bent his steps, in pursuance of the last wish expressed by Satanais, towards the grove in whose shade he had met Gloria on the occasion when she declared her love.

That verdant spot,—so rich in its emerald green and so variegated with floral loveliness,—stood upon the bank of the river Moldau; and the knight was proceeding along the margin of the transparent stream in the direction of the grove, when he was suddenly startled and shocked by beholding a female form floating down with the rapid current.

At the same instant he recognized the countenance, the beauteous countenance, of Angela; and, obedient to the only impulse which his generous nature under such circumstances could feel, he plunged into the river to her rescue.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GLORIA'S POINARD.

The maiden had seen him—had recognised him—and had even stretched out her arms towards him, as the tide swept her past the spot whence he instantaneously sprang to her succour; while a scream burst from her lips—a scream which in its thrilling tones denoted how suddenly a ray of hope had flashed athwart the black cloud of despair that enveloped her soul.

Though fleet and fast glided the current of the Moidau, Sir Ernest clave the mass of water with so strong an arm that his form went dashing through it like a sharp-prowed vessel impelled by vigorous rowers; but just at the moment that his hand was about to grasp the vesture of the garment of the maiden, she sank with an abruptness as if her aerial shape had suddenly been transformed into a lump of lead. The warrior dived after her; vain was the attempt, she rose at a distance lower down the stream, and the rending voice of her anguish once more pierced the warm, balmy, aud sun-lit air.

With almost superhuman efforts did Sir Ernest de Colmar make his way through the gurgling water, his eyes fixed upon the lovely Angela's form as it was hurried along; but all in a moment she disappeared again, and the horrible thought struck to the knight's soul that she had sunk to rise no more.

But, O joy! his hand clutched her garments as he dived to her rescue; he retained his hold upon her—he raised her to the surface—he sustained her there, all senseless as she was—and in a few moments he placed her in safety upon the flower-gemmed bank.

For an instant he dreaded that the lamp of life was extinguished in the maiden's bosom; and it was with a species of blank despair that the generous-hearted knight bent over the inanimate form that lay motionless and breathless as a marble statue, and likewise as a statue pale, upon the sward sloping down to the stream whence had snatched her.

Horrified by the thought that she, so young and beautiful, had perhaps only escaped a watery tomb in order to find a grave upon the land, he now hastened to adopt all the means which suggested themselves to effect her restoration.—He wrung out the moisture from her long chestnut hair; he took her hands and rubbed them briskly between his own; and in a little more than a minute he was relieved from a cruel suspense by beholding a roseate tinge returning to her cheeks, faint indeed, at first, but still affording a sure indication that the spark of existence was rekindling within her.

The bosom began to heave slowly with the returning breath; and then she opened her melting blue eyes, which gazed up into the knight's countenance with a species of bewilderment—as if the maiden were just awakening from a profound slumber the effects of which still held complete consciousness in abeyance. But when De Colmar spoke a few reassuring words, the lamp of memory appeared to light up suddenly; and it was evident that a flood of recollections swept up into her brain, making her aware of what had happened and who had saved her; for the look which she now fixed upon De Colmar was one of the deepest, most fervent, most heartfelt gratitude.

At this instant a slight rustling was heard amongst the adjacent trees; De Colmar raised his eyes; and, behold! the transcendent Gloria stood before him!

An expression of mingled surprise and joy appeared upon her radiant countenance as the condition of the knight and Angela, whose clothes were dripping, at once enabled her to form an idea of the incident which had occurred; she was surprised at encountering De Colmar in such a predicament,—and she was rejoiced that he had escaped the peril which he had evidently dared. But that expression almost instantaneously changed to one of vexation and annoyance, as a second glance at Angela's features showed her how beautiful was the young woman whom De Colmar had snatched from a watery tomb.

Yes, a feeling of jealously had seized upon Gloria; but, as if ashamed of having yielded to the sentiment even for a moment, she breathed a few kind though hurried words to the knight,—then, placing a small ivory whistle to her lips, blew it shrilly

There was a rustling in the adjacent grove, as of persons hastening to obey the summons thus given; and, in less than a minute from amidst the trees appeared Linda and Beatrice, followed by two Taborite warriors.

'Maidens,' said Gloria, addressing the two beauteous girls, 'to your charge do I entrust this young woman, who, as it would appear, has narrowly escaped a sad death; and you, my good friends,' she continued, turning towards the Taborite soldiers, 'will conduct Sir Ernest de Colmar to your tent, where you will provide his excellency with change of raiment and minister unto him with all possible attention and respect. 'Sir Knight,' she added, bending her lustrous looks upon the Austrian warrior, and sinking her voice so as to be audible to him alone, 'I shall await thee here, if thou wilt presently condescend to grant me thy companionship for a few moments.'

'Lady,' answered De Colmar, 'I came hither at this hour on purpose to receive any commands which thou may'st have for me.'

'I thank thee, Sir Knight,' responded Gloria, in a still more subdued and melting voice; and, as she spoke, her looks were thrown with an irrepressible feeling of tenderness upon his handsome countenance; then, at the next moment, her eyes were cast down with a mournful bashfulness, while her bosom of dazzling whiteness rose and fell with a profound sigh.

Meantime Linda and Beatrice had raised Angela between them; and the maiden was now sufficiently recovered to walk, supported by the arms of these two lovely and gentle girls whom Gloria had summoned to her aid. Sir Ernest de Colmar motioned to the Taberite soldiers to l ad the way; and the little party plunged into the grove, the beauteous Gloria remaining alone on the bank of the river.

Having proceeded about two hundred yards, amidst the maze of emerald verdure, Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela found that their guides had brought them to a small open spece where the

trees had been cut down in order to make room for half-a-dozen tents that were pitched there, and in the midst of which was a pavilion of elegant appearance. Into this handsome, though temporary dwelling-place, did Linda and Beatrice conduct Angela, while the two Taborite soldiers escorted De Colmar to one of the surrounding tents.

In the pavilion the two hand-maidens rendered Angela all the services required by one in her condition. They assisted her to lay aside her dripping apparel, furnished her with other raiment, and made her repose her exhausted frame upon a couch, where a deep slumber soon visited her eyes.

Meantime the officer commanding the little Taborite outpost established in the grove, paid his respects to Sir Ernest de Colmar, and supplied him with the best suit of apparel which his wardrobe could possibly furnish; and when the knight had thus exchanged his wet garments for clothing that was at all events dry and comfortable, if not so elegant as his own, he hastened to make inquiries concerning Angela. The information he obtained was satisfactory; the maiden was entirely out of danger, and had fallen into a refreshing sleep, while Linda and Beatrice were prepared to show her every attention when she should awake!

Being thus relieved from any apprehension with regard to the interesting young woman whom he had thus a second time rescued from peril, Sir Ernest de Colmar thanked the Taborites for their kindness towards himself, and then hastened through the grove to rejoin the charming Gloria on the bank of the river.

In the meantime that being of transcendent beauty—the Daughter of Glory—was moving slowly along by the margin of the Moldau, her eyes bent upon the ground, so that the long fringes of the lids rested on her damask cheeks, and veiled the supernal power of those orbs which shone with the effulgence of heaven. Her veil, being thrown partially back, exposed a portion of her hair to the sunlight, which made her head seem as if crowned with a blaze of golden lustre, so rich and so glowing were the tresses which thus caught and imprisoned the beams of the orb of day.

But though so dazzling in her wondrous charms, yet Gloria was not altogether happy now. Her manner was pensive, her step was slow and even mournful, and a melancholy expression sat upon that countenance which seemed formed to wear only smiles of pleasure and of love.

The truth was that Gloria could not divest her mind of a certain painful sensation which had seized upon it, when she beheld Sir Ernest de Colmar bestowing tender, yet delicate, attentions on the young female whom he had rescued from the Moldau. She endeavored to discard this feeling of jealousy as one unworthy of herself and derogatory to him; but she could not thus easily thrust it forth from her soul. It clung with a vexatious tenacity to the tenderest chords which vibrated in her heart.

Hence was it that Gloria's countenance had become mournful, and that she was plunged in a deep reverie, as she proceeded slowly along the bank of the river.

And now she reached that shady place where she had encountered Sir Ernest de Colmar on the occasion when she revealed to him her own love, and learnt from his lips that he was enamored of Satanais. But, oh! strange to tell, a sudden glow of joy and delight animated her features as her eyes settled upon the very spot where she and De Colmar had stood when he imparted to her the secret of his love for Satanais, and when she gave vent to that ejaculation which sounded like a cry of ecstacy, and not of anguish, in his ears.

'Oh! wherefore should I yield to this sentiment of jealousy which has seized upon me?' she exclaimed aloud, her countenance becoming radiant with triumph, joy, hope, and fervid passion. 'He is mine—mine—that hero so chivalrous in character, so generous in soul, and so handsome in person—oh! he is mine—mine!'

And her voice rolled in its golden harmony amongst the trees.

But suddenly from amidst the emerald shade a form appeared; and Gloria, the radiant Gloria, found herself confronted all in an instant by an old woman, whose appearance, though in itself having nothing terrible, nevertheless produced a strange and startling effect upon the Daughter of Glory.

'Demoness! what dost thou here?' she exclaimed, her lustrous eyes darting forth lightning upon the composed and unruffled countenance of the old woman who stood calmly in her presence.

'Sister Marietta, wilt thou return with me to those who are prepared to give thee a cordial welcome, and will

overlook the past?' demanded the crone.

'Wretch! how dare you address me with such a proposal?' cried Gloria, the sapphire veins on her polished forehead now swelling almost to bursting, and her fine bust heaving with the agitation of emotions profoundly excited. 'Think you that I will ever return *alive* to that convent——'

'I speak not of the convent, Sister Marietta,' interrupted the old woman. 'But I allude to that terrestrial paradise in which, when the silver bell tinkles at midnight——'

'Hold! be silent, I command you!' exclaimed Gloria, her whole being expanding as it were into an aspect of terrible menace and even fiendish fury, so that she now seemed really awful in all the wild excitement of her feelings and in the storm which thus swept so fearfully over the radiant heaven of her sunny loveliness.

'Sister Marietta, your wrath produces no effect upon me,' said the old woman; 'nor shall it prevent me from warning you, while it is yet time, to abandon the cause and society of these wicked infidels who denominate themselves Taborites. Leave them, I say; return to those who will make you welcome; or else, Sister Marietta,' added the crone. her countenance, naturally good-tempered in expression, becoming darkly ominous in its look, 'or else must thou expect that thy righteous doom will sooner or later overtake thee, and that the Bronze Statue will claim its victim!'

'Wretched woman, I defy thy menaces!' ejaculated Gloria, every pulse quivering and every vein throbbing with the fury that shook her from head to foot. 'Listen, Dame Martha,' she continued, in a somewhat calmer tone: then, fixing her lightning-flashing eyes upon the old woman with a look of deep significancy, she said, 'Were it not for that tremendous oath which I swore in the presence of those ghastly witnesses, I would impart to the ear of General Zitzka such intelligence as would prompt him to uproot that community, level their habitations to the ground, and inflict a fearful vengeance on all those who——'

'Ah! but that oath binds thee. Sister Marietta!' cried the old woman, with a taunting tone and a manner indicative of malignant triumph.

'Beware how you insult me, Dame Martha!' said Gloria, her countenance becoming crimson with rage, and the deep glow descending to her neck and bosom; 'for if I have vowed to be silent, I have not sworn to spare my enemies!'

'And if you treat *me* as an enemy,' returned the old woman, 'what is to prevent me from acting as one?'

'I do not understand you,' answered Gloria, in a tone of sovereign haughtiness, while she drew up her noble form to its full height, and a queen-like dignity was expressed in every lineament and contour; the polished brow, the flashing eyes, the dilating nostrils, the curling lips, the expanding breast, and the rounding arms!

'You do not understand me?' echoed Dame Martha; then, throwing a rapid glance around, and doubtless believing that as she saw no one near, this lonely appearance of the spot was to be indeed relied upon as favorable to the project which she was revolving in her mind, she suddenly drew a dagger from beneath her upper garment, exclaiming, 'Now shalt thou accompany me whithersoever I may choose to lead, Sister Marietta, or instantaneous death——'

But the crone's sentence was cut short upon her lips; for, swiftly as the arrow cleaves the invisible air, did Gloria draw forth a long, thin, sharp poinard from amidst the folds of her flowing robe, and, quickly as the blade gleamed in the sunshine, was it plunged into Dame Martha's breast!

Without a moan she fell—without a convulsion she lay a corpse at Gloria's feet!

And it was at this moment that Sir Ernest de Colmar, having retraced his way from the Taborite outpost in the grove, made his appearance upon the scene; but only to recoil in horror from the conviction that Gloria was a murderess!

'Sir Knight, think not more darkly of me than I deserve,' she hastened to exclaim in a tone which seemed to appeal to him for a merciful consideration of the case; that woman menaced me—behold the dagger in her own hand; she would have taken my life if I had not suddenly anticipated her fell intent——'

'Ah! she threatened you, Gloria?' said De Colmar, his generous nature causing him to experience a sentiment of delight at the springing up of any circumstance tending to lessen the amount of that beauteous creature's guilt; for his soul revolted at the idea

that a being with so angelic a form could have become suddenly stamped with the iniquity of a fiend.

'Mark you the dagger in her hand, I say!' exclaimed Gloria. 'Behold—even in death she clutches it, so terrible was her hatred against me! so intense her thirst for my blood!'

'Alas! alas!' said De Colmar, surveying Gloria with looks that expressed a boundless compassion; 'sad is thy destiny, beauteous lady, which has led thee to the commission of this deed! In true justice, thou art not to be blamed; 'twas life against life, and the death of one was inevitable in order to save the existence of the other! Yes, I do indeed behold that proof of the menace which maddened thee to strike the fatal blow. But, oh! it is enough that the rough hands of man should be stained with blood, without the delicate fingers of woman becoming dabbled with the sanguine tide!'

'Is it possible that you hate me for this deed?' asked Gloria, approaching her countenance so close to De Colmar's that he felt her pure breath upon his cheeks, while her appealing, half-terrified, yet lustrous eyes gazed tenderly into his own, and she laid her taper fingers upon his hand.

'Hate you! Oh! no, no—that were impossible!' cried De Colmar, speaking however, in the generous and impulsive enthusiasm which prompted him to console the Daughter of Glory, and dry the tears which had started forth from her long lashes. 'For your sister's sake, if not for your own, must I respect and admire you; aye, and love you as if I were your brother. But would to God that it were a man who had fallen this day, and that it were my hand which had slain him!'

'Oh! I am unhappy—most unhappy!' exclaimed Gloria, bursting now into an agony of tears. 'I see that you recoil from me—that you look upon me as if I were a cold-blooded murderess—that it is only the generosity of your nature, and not the real state of your feeling, which has prompted you to speak kind words to me——'

'Cease this passionate weeping, Gloria; cease these bitter lamentations!' interrupted De Colmar. 'You misjudge me; you wrong me! I do not hate you; I do not recoil from you—my God! no; but I pity you! I deplore the destiny which has led you to perpetrate this deed; I lament the fate which has stained your hands with blood! Oh! believe me, Gloria—believe me, when I assure you it is in this light that I contemplate the appalling catastrophe!'

'And you still love me—as a sister?' murmured Gloria, drooping her radiant head upon his breast.

'Do not doubt it!' exclaimed the knight, gently disengaging himself from that contact which made him feel as if he were playing a treacherous part to the memory of Satanais.

'And if it had been my sister whose hand had done that deed,' said Gloria, looking up into De Colmar's eyes with an expression of countenance so strange—so delicately martyrized—so supplicating and so deprecating, that he experienced at the moment an irresistible fascination, a melting tenderness stealing over him, as if he felt that had there been no Satanais in the world he could have loved Gloria dearly—dearly.

'What a strange question is this which you have asked me!' he exclaimed, unable to withdraw his eyes from her ravishing countenance, which only required the olive tint and the raven hair to render it that of Satanais, so precisely the same was it in facial outline and the form of all its lineaments.

'How a strange question?' demanded Gloria, her pearly teeth shining between the rich redness of her lips. 'I ask you again, and I ask you seriously and earnestly, whether you would have recoiled in horror from Satanais, had *her* hand dealt the blow?'

And, as she uttered the last words of her query, she turned shudderingly towards the corpse that lay upon the flowery bank of the river.

'Gloria,' said De Colmar, 'I should deplore the destiny which had prompted this deed, as much in respect to Satanais as with regard to yourself. But let us talk thereon no more, let us even cease to think, if possible, on so sad a subject. Behold—thus disappears the evidence of the deplorable adventure.'

And he hurled the corpse of Dame Martha into the stream.

'Now, beauteous lady,' continued the knight, 'tell me in what manner I can serve you. In a few days I am compelled to leave Prague and return to Vienna,' he observed, with a profound sigh, as he thought of the conditions imposed upon him by his sable conqueror of the preceding night.

'To Vienna!' echoed Gloria. 'Oh! if I dared——'

And she stopped short, casting down her eyes in modest confusion.

'Speak freely and openly,' said De Colmar; 'I have solemnly promised Satanais to do thy behest in all things. Wilt thou not look upon me as a brother? wilt thou not believe that I can treat thee with the delicate attentions due to a sister?'

'Oh! how can I express my gratitude sufficiently?' exclaimed Gloria, her countenance lighting up with indescribable joy. 'But I will at all events speak candidly and frankly. Know, thee, that I myself am desirous of repairing to Vienna, accompanied by the two handmaidens whom my sister has left in attendance upon me——'

'You will accept, then, of the escort of myself and my pages?' said the knight. 'Within six days I am bound to depart hence—Satanais has doubtless explained to you under what compulsory influence,' he added, in a mournful tone.

'Yes, alas! I know all,' murmured Gloria, turning abruptly aside and covering her countenance with both her hands.

'Oh! you weep for your sister, you are inconsolable at being separated from her?' exclaimed De Colmar, in a tone of deep sympathy.

'My God! if I could only tell you the truth now, at once!' ejaculated Gloria, turning towards him with strange abruptness, and speaking with a hurried and almost passionate excitement. 'But no, no! I am mad to dream of it!' she cried, immediately afterwards; 'not yet—not yet—'tis impossible! At Vienna perhaps——'

And, suddenly checking herself, she assumed an attitude of profound thought, while De Colmar's eyes were rivetted upon her in mingled amazement and curiosity.

What truth had she to reveal? what strange mystery was there to clear up? what secret had she been seized with a sudden anxiety to make known *at once?* He dared not ask her, she was such a singular being, so romantic in all that concerned her, so unlike the rest of the female race, in her wild and wondrous destiny.

'Think no more of what I have just said,' she observed, at length starting from her reverie; 'or rather exercise your patience until the proper time shall come for me to reveal a mystery that will overwhelm you with amazement, and yet account for so many things that have astonished you already—that are astonishing you now, and that will yet astonish you in future. But to divert the conversation into another channel,' she continued more gaily, 'let me hasten to declare that I accept with gratitude and pleasure your proffered escort to Vienna. On the sixth morning hence, soon after sunrise, I will join you outside the city gate, opening upon the grand road that leads towards the Austrian frontier. And now, before I say farewell, tell me who is the young female whom you rescued from drowning; that is, if you be acquainted with her at all, so that I may know with what degree of distinction to treat her, as it is probable that after so severe a struggle with death she will remain my guest for two or three days.'

'She is the adopted daughter of certain worthy peasants, dwelling in a forest near Altendorf Castle,' replied Sir Ernest de Colmar; 'and although of humble birth, at least as far as can be known, Angela Wildon possesses intelligence, beauty, and virtue sufficient to render her an ornament to a noble's palace. All the care and attention which you may bestow upon her, Gloria,' added the knight emphatically, 'will be vouchsafed to a worthy object.'

'You speak ardently in her favor,' said the Daughter of Glory, unable to conceal a certain expression of vexation in her tone.

'Not more warmly than Angela deserves,' responded De Colmar, his voice and manner alike conveying a gentle remonstrance on account of that jealous feeling which he had not failed to perceive on Gloria's part. 'Last night, after that dread conflict, I was left senseless upon the heath; and heaven alone can tell how long I should have remained in that condition, or how soon death itself might have fastened upon me, had not Angela Wildon, while passing that way, tarried to succor me. You perceive therefore, Gloria, that I owe her no inconsiderable debt of gratitude; and inasmuch as I was combatting in your sister's cause when I experienced the defeat, which left me senseless on that waste where Angela found me, it will be but a graceful act on your part to treat that young woman with all possible kindness.'

'Oh! you cannot think that my nature is ungenerous!' exclaimed Gloria, blushing deeply, for she saw that her jealousy had not escaped the notice of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'No, I am confident that you are too noble-minded to entertain paltry and

unworthy feelings,' he answered; then, taking her hand, he pressed it cordially, saying, 'Farewell, Gloria, farewell, until the sixth morning hence.'

'Farewell!' she murmured, throwing upon him a look full of unutterable feeling, while her bosom swelled with the profound sigh which thus powerfully upheaved it.

The knight and the lady separated; the former retracing his steps into the city, and the latter returning to her pavilion in the grove.

But what idea was uppermost in the mind of each? The assassination o Dame Martha

Oh! the Daughter of Glory would have given worlds that it should not have taken place; or, at all events, that the deed should have remained concealed from Sir Ernest de Colmar; while, on his part, the knight would likewise have made no insignificant personal sacrifice to have saved Gloria from that blood-stain which was now upon her brow!

Nevertheless, the radiant being gave not way to despair; but more than once, as she traversed the grove on her way back to her pavilion, she repeated that strange and exulting ejaculation,—'*He is mine! he is mine!*'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LIONEL AND KONRAD.

The reader will remember the instructions which Sir Ernest de Colmar gave to his two pages respecting his desire that they should endeavor to find out the place of concealment where the Princess Elizabetha of Bohemia had sought refuge.

In pursuance of those commands, the youths held a consultation together; and their first step was to make inquiries whether any portrait of the princess was in existence, so that they might obtain a view thereof, and by becoming acquainted with her highness's personal appearance, be enabled to recognize her even under a disguise and false name. From worthy Master Templin they ascertained that there was indeed such a portrait in the palace at the time of King Wenzel's death; but whether it were still within those deserted walls, the worthy landlord could not say.—Moreover, the palace was shut up, the keys were in the possession of Zitzka, and it was not therefore an easy matter to obtain access to the portrait, even if it were still in the royal dwelling. But Lionel and Konrad were not to be daunted by any opposition, until experience had proved it to be insurmountable. They accordingly one night penetrated into the palace by the simple process of breaking their way through a window; and provided with the means of procuring a light, they wandered from room to room in search of the portrait. Their task seemed hopeless, and they were about to quit the spacious building under the impression that they had inspected every part of it, when they unexpectedly found themselves in a small sleeping-chamber which they had previously missed or overlooked.

And what did they behold here? A portrait! yes—but, to their unspeakable amazement, it was the exact representative of a living original whom they had seen elsewhere!

You will not fail to recollect, gentle reader, a certain beautiful young lady to whom Lionel had been introduced at that gorgeous festival where he and his fellow-page had become such welcome guests, under circumstances so mysterious and romantic. That young lady was described by us as being of ravishing loveliness, attired in crimson velvet, and holding a variegated fan in her hand; and this fair creature it was whose portrait the youths now found in the royal palace!

But how did they acquire the assurance that it was the portrait of the Princess Elizabetha? Because the name appeared amidst the armorial blazonry which embellished the top of the ponderous frame!

Thus far, then, their researches were rewarded with success, They had discovered an important clue to the whereabouts of the princess; but for certain reasons which will appear hereafter, they were not only stricken with mingled surprise and sorrow at the thought that she was an inmate of that splendid mansion where they had seen her, but they were likewise resolved to dare any peril and run any risk in order to remove her thence.

But how were they to discover where that mansion was situated? The environs of Prague were dotted with numerous beautiful villas, and the youths knew not in which direction they had been conducted by the old woman, after they were blindfolded in the cemetery on the memorable night of their intro-

duction to the 'terrestrial paradise,' as the crone had denominated it.

For several days did they wander about Prague and its vicinity, in the hope of meeting this ancient dame once more, and persuading her to conduct them back to the scene of pleasure. But in that anticipation they were disappointed; the crone re-appeared not before their eyes!

It was verging towards sunset on the 15th of August, the date of that memorable night on which Sir Ernest de Colmar fought as the champion of Satanais, that the two pages were walking together upon the ramparts, when they suddenly attracted the notice of a lady of fine form and majestic bearing, who was hastening in the direction of the southern gate. She was closely veiled, but her rich attire, her queen-like gait, and the two well-dressed female dependants who followed her, denoted that she was a person of quality and consideration.

Lionel and Konrad stood aside to make room for her; and she was about to pass them, when an ejaculation of mingled pleasure and surprise burst from her lips; and stopping short, she raised her veil, thus revealing the grandly handsome countenance of the lady who had presided over the festival, and was indeed the mistress of the mansion at which it had taken place.

The youths instantaneously recognized her; and, doffing their caps, they expressed the joy which they experienced at meeting her again, and the hope which they cherished of being permitted to visit her dwelling once more. With captivating affability did the lady assure them their desire should be gratified that very evening; and replacing her veil over her countenance, she bade them accompany her.

To that picturesque cemetery which has already been mentioned more than once, did the party now proceed; and on arriving at the little chapel on the outskirt of the burial ground, horses were found in readiness. Konrad and Lionel had to submit to the process of disguise and blindfolding by means of the ecclesiastical gowns and hoods; and after an hour's ride, they reached their destination. As on the former occasion, they were conducted to the toilette-chamber, where they bathed in tepid founts of rose-water and then assumed a rich and elegant apparel chosen from a well-furnished wardrobe.

A little before midnight, the youths were escorted to the ante-room, in which the water-clock stood in a recess and the silver bell was suspended in the illuminated lantern; then, at the moment when the clepsydra marked the magic hour and the tinkling chime sent forth its musical sound, the massive portals unfolded their gilded wings and the pages entered a second time amidst the roseate scene of pleasure.

There was the same blaze of female loveliness which on the former occasion had burst in such overpowering splendor upon the vision of the ravished youths; there was the same congress of unrivalled charms; and there also was the same gorgeous magnificence of the saloon.

A glance amidst the throng of ladies gave Lionel and Konrad the welcome assurance that the object of their visit was indeed there; and the mental comparison which they each momentarily made between that fair creature and the portrait in the royal dwelling, placed beyond any possibility of doubt the fact that she was none other than the Princess Elizabetha of Bohemia.

Amongst the gay gallants and handsome cavaliers who were now present, the two pages beheld not the fine tall man who had worn the gold chain of a marquis, and who was the constant companion of the mistress of the mansion on the previous occasion of their visit to this saloon of luxury, elegance, and pleasure. It also struck the youths that there was a partial shade of melancholy upon the countenance of their brilliant hostess, as if she regretted the absence of her noble friend, whoever he might be.

And now, to the joy of Lionel, the mistress of the mansion presented him to the Princess Elizabetha, while Konrad became the cavalier of the same young lady to whom his attentions were devoted on the former occasion.

Seating himself by the side of the Princess, who, occupied a voluptuous ottoman, Lionel said, 'Doubtless you do not recognise me again, fair lady?'

'Yes, gentle cavalier, I had not forgotten you,' she responded, in a soft voice which was naturally melancholy and plaintive in tone. 'But how happens it that you have become a second time an inmate of this mansion?'

'Lady,' said the young page, flinging a rapid glance around and assuring himself that he could speak without the fear of being overheard by others, 'I had a motive—a very particular mo-

tive in seeking an opportunity to penetrate hither once more. But pray,—I beseech, I implore you,—look as if our conversation were of a gay and indifferent character——'

'Yes, continue!' exclaimed the princes, in an under tone; and she fixed her blue eyes searchingly upon the handsome countenance of the page. 'I have a presentiment that you are here on my behalf, and I read frankness, candor, and chivalrous generosity in your features. Tell me, then, who are you?'

'Is the name of Sir Ernest de Colmar familiar to your highness?' inquired the youth, assuming at the same time a smiling aspect so as to cheat the rest of the company into the belief that he was playing the part of an agreeable cavalier and dispensing the usual compliments and flattery to his fair companion. 'Is that name known to your highness? or shall I mention another and prouder——'

'Austria has not, then, deserted my interests altogether!' interrupted the princess, as soon as she had partially recovered from the amazement into which the youth's words had thrown her. 'Yes, the name of Sir Ernest de Colmar is indeed familiar to me. His excellency visited me some three weeks ago, in his capacity of envoy from the puissant Albert of Austria——But I am revealing secrets without knowing who *you* are,' exclaimed the princess, suddenly checking herself. 'Tell me in the first place how you came to discover the place of my imprisonment—or rather *concealment*,' she added hastily; 'and how you ascertained that I am indeed the unhappy Princess of Bohemia?'

'Illustrious lady,' whispered Lionel, 'when I tell your highness that I am but a humble page in the service of that same Sir Ernest de Colmar——'

'Oh! then, I will trust you, good youth,' interrupted the princess; 'for I remember that your worthy master manifested the deepest sympathy towards me. What do you propose? what do you wish?' she demanded, with feverish impatience.

'To bear you hence, royal lady, and place you under the protection of Austria,' was the response, delivered in a low but solemn tone.

'Oh! heavens—what gratitude already fills my heart!' murmured Elizabetha, her eyes glittering with the uneasy expression of mingled joy and suspense. 'But the plan of escape—the mode of departure hence——'

'Neither I nor my fellow-page have any project arranged beforehand,' answered Lionel. 'We can only help your highness with our good will, our fidelity, and our swords. 'Tis for you to command, and for us to obey.'

'Then not a moment is to be lost!' said Elizabetha, her heart fluttering like an imprisoned bird in its cage. 'Within ten minutes the portals of the saloon will be closed and the voluptuous revels will commence,' she added, a burning blush suffusing her cheeks. 'Now we may pass unnoticed through the ante-room. Come, let us fly!'

'Tranquillise yourself,' whispered Lionel in an imploring tone, as he rose from the ottoman and gave the princess his arm. 'The least excitement on the part of your highness, and we are undone!'

'Fear nothing!' responded Elizabetha. 'I am now playing too grand a stake to risk its loss by any folly of my own. Is your companion following us?' she demanded, as she passed slowly on towards the shining portals, leaning upon Lionel's arm.

'Yes, he has quitted his fair companion on some pretence,' answered the youth, perceiving that Konrad was close in the rear. 'But is your royal highness well assured of the practicability of the step you are about to take?'

'I am aware that there is a subterranean passage which will most probably lead us to safety,' was the prompt reply. 'But if there is any opposition—'

'Then bright swords and hard blows must decide the point,' added Lionel, in a resolute tone.

They now passed into the ante-room, where Konrad almost immediately joined them; and while affecting to be intent on contemplating the mechanism of the beautiful water-clock, they assured themselves with hasty glances that the numerous inmates of the saloon were too much occupied in conversation, flirting, merriment, and tender whispering, to pay any particular attention to their movements.

Sauntering forth from the ante-room in an apparently leisurely manner, the princess and the two pages crossed the magnificent landing outside, descended the superb marble staircase, and reached the hall, which, fortunately for their design, was at the moment entirely de-

serted by the menials usually in attend ance there.

'Thus far success has waited upon us,' observed the princess; 'but now come the difficulty and the danger!'

Thus speaking, she opened a small but massive door standing in the shade of a recess beneath the splendid marble staircase, and a flight of steps appeared, the upper portion being illumined by the lustre of the rosy-tinted lamps hanging in the hall.

Down these stone stairs the princess and the two young pages passed, closing the door behind them; and they found that the lower part of the somewhat precipitous descent was lighted by a lamp placed in a niche.

Konrad possessed himself of this lamp, and, taking the lead, he advanced a few paces in front of the princess and Lionel.

But scarcely had they proceeded a dozen yards alonp the vaulted subterranean passage, when a light flashed suddenly from a deep recess, ejaculations of mingled surprise and rage fell upon their ears, and in another moment several armed men, whose countenances were covered with black masks, rushed upon the princess and the two companions of her flight,

At the same instant Father Cyprian, bearing a torch in his hand, appeared npon the scene, exclaiming to his masked dependents, 'Slaughter not the youths, but take them prisoners, and they shall become victims to the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss!'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE JOURNEY OF THREE DAYS.

At this sudden appearance of the Carthusian priest and his dependants in the black masks, the Princess Elizabetha uttered a piercing shriek and joined her hands in despair. Lionel's sword instantly flew from its scabbard, and Konrad, dropping the lamp, likewise grasped the weapon which he wore; but resistance was vain; a dozen armed men surrounded them, and they were overpowered in a moment. Then, having been forcibly enveloped and muffled in priests' gowns, the youths were hurried along the subterranean passage at a rapid rate, while the screams of the Princess of Bohemia made them aware that she was being borne back again up the stone steps into the mansion whence she had so fruitlessly endeavored to escape.

Not a word was spoken by those into whose power Lionel and Konrad had thus fallen; nor did they even know whether Father Cyprian was still with the party of men who were hurrying them onward, or whether he remained behind with the princess,

In a few minutes a door was thrown open; and when they had passed, a portal clanged behind them with a din denoting its massive form and metallic strength; while the echoes which it raised, beating in prolonged reverberations, showed that the rapid and mysterious journey was still continued in a vaulted subterranean, paved, walled, and roofed with solid masonry.

Even through the darkness of the cowls which had been drawn over their countenances, the youths could obtain a feeble glimpse of the beaming of a torch which some one carried in advance: now it paused again, another door was opened, on went the party, the door clanged behind, and the hurried pace was continued. In about ten minutes from the time when this mysterious march commenced through the silent subterranean, a third door was opened, an ascent of stone steps was mounted, another portal moaned on its hinges, and, having traversed a place which, as well as the youths could judge, appeared to be a vast marble hall, they emerged into the open air. Here they stopped short, and a voice exclaimed in a tone of authority, 'Bring out the horses!'

It was Father Cyprian who spoke, and the pages therefore ncquired the certainty that the priest was at the head of the party.

In a few minutes the trampling of iron-shod hoofs was heard; the youths were compelled to mount each a steed, and on the backs of the animals were they bound by means of cords fastened to their ankles, and passing under the bellies of their horses. The party then rode off at a rapid pace: for an instant the echoes of an arched gate-way fell upon their ears; then the din of the heavy hoofs on a draw-bridge succeeded, and in another moment the equestrians entered upon a hard and gently sloping road, along which they proceeded briskly.

For an hour was the journey continued in profound silence; and the reader will scarcely require to be informed

that, brave as the young pages were, their reflections were not of the most pleasurable description. Although they had never seen the Bronze Statue in Altendorf Castle—although they knew not even its existence, and had never before heard any allusion made to such an object—yet now it dwelt uppermost in their minds as something terrible in the extreme; for the Carthusian's words had proclaimed that they were to become its victims.

The victims of what? Of a thing which, though only understood so far as its own name explained its nature, now loomed upon them like a hideous and portentous shape from amidst the darkness of their own mental uncertainty; an undefined yet dreadful form whose kiss perchance was death!

The aspect of that unknown terror which the imagination, when only slightly prompted, tortures itself to depict, is invariably more appalling than when the baleful object of alarm is fully explained, or when the impending danger is viewed face to face; and thus were the fears of the captive youths enhanced, not only by the tremendous suspense caused by their ignorance of the doom which awaited them, but likewise by the excruciating strainings made by their goaded fancy, to bring into vivid outlines their perplexed and bewildered notions of that menaced fate!

At the expiration of an hour, the party stopped at a way-side hostel, or inn, into which Konrad and Lionel were conducted; and, the priests' gowns being now taken off them, they were desired to partake of some refreshment which was served up in a private room. Of this invitation they gladly availed themselves, so far as a cup of wine went; but they were in no humor to indulge in substantial food.

Their vision being now relieved of the muffling cowl, they observed that there were four armed men, together with Father Cyprian, in company with them. The former removed their black masks while they partook of the meal to which they sate down; while the priest, placing himself a little way apart, ate a piece of bread and drank a draught of water. He never once glanced towards the two pages during the time they were thus all together at the inn; but his myrmidons surveyed them with some attention from time to time; and assuredly, never did more menacing eyes gleam forth from beneath the half-concealment of shaggy overhanging brows, or impart a sinister light to more villanous-looking countenances.

The meal was concluded, the party remounted their steeds, and the youths were somewhat cheered to find that they were not to be again muffled in the gowns and cowls. For although the night—or rather morning, it being now two hours past midnight—was fearfully tempestuous, as described in that chapter which narrates how Sir Ernest de Colmar went forth to do battle as the champion of Satanais, it was nevertheless more agreeable to Lionel and Konrad to be able to breathe the air without hindrance, and to behold as much of the surrounding objects as the obscurity would permit, than to be hurried on headlong in the total darkness and the semi-suffocation of the cowl.

The horses, refreshed by the halt and its accompanying bait, cantered bravely along the broad and even road which intersected verdant plains and emerald woods, now immersed in almost utter darkness; and in silence was the journey continued.

Two hours and upwards passed; and then a faint glimmering began to appear in the eastern horizon. The direction where the glimpses of dawn were thus struggling through the darkly-curtained sky, enabled the youths to judge that they were pursuing a southerly direction. But so gloomily and tardily did daybreak advance, that it was some time before any objects save those which were quite near became visible, as the equestrian party careered along the road; and it was now through a mist of white unwholesome vapor that more distant things began to stand out as it were from the receding darkness. Then did it strike Konrad and Lionel that certain features of the country through which they were passing were not altogether unfamiliar to them; and, in a short space, they recognised and recalled to mind a few particular objects which they had observed on a previous occasion, and which convinced them that they were travelling on the same road that they had pursued, though in the contrary direction, when journeying to Prague with their master, Sir Ernest de Colmar.

And now, as the day advanced, the mist, which had at one period threatened to turn into drizzling rain, cleared away from the presence of the refulgent sun; the sky became a bright azure, with a few fleecy clouds passing languidly over, like the white sails of

far-off ships moving sluggishly on the bosom of a sapphire sea; the distant mountains, bursting forth from the vanishing vapors, appeared as if their steeps were of burnished gold and their summits of sunny blue; in the gardens the autumnal fruitage that gemmed the boughs and in the fields the yellow sheaves seemed to turn into living glories; and in the pellucid lake the imagery of its grove-girdled shores was traced in rippling shadows.

But, oh! pale were the countenances and heavy were the hearts of Konrad and Lionel as they beheld all the gorgeous features and all the touching beauty of this splendidly sun-lit scene, for perhaps, while the world was awaking to the enjoyment of a new day and nature was decking herself in all her fairest and brightest garments, these youths were hastening on to the goal of some terrible doom!

They glanced at each other; but they had no looks of hope to exchange; they glanced at the armed men, whose countenances, on which the masks had not been replaced since they stopped at the way-side inn, were as menacingly sinister and brutally ferocious as ever; and they glanced at the Carthusian priest, but in his lineaments they beheld nought to encourage and nothing to reassure! Then their eyes met again, and in silent eloquence they simultaneously expressed the same harrowing idea, an idea which, if framed in words, would have been conveyed by the three dread monosyllables—'We are lost!'

At about an hour after sunrise, the party stopped an another lonely hostel upon the road's side; and there a substantial breakfast was served up. But the youths could not eat. They were sick at heart; for their fate, whatever it was to be, seemed inevitable; and succor appeared beyond all hope. The landlord of the inn where they now halted, was a morose ill-favored man; and by certain looks of intelligence which passed between him and the armed bravos, it was quite clear that they were no strangers to each other. To appeal to that man was, therefore, evidently useless; and even if his aspect had been good-tempered and benignant as an angel's, he was powerless to assist the youths against such formidable odds as the priest's party mustered.

The halt at this inn lasted two hours, so that the steeds might be adequately refreshed. During this interval the youths were allowed to perform their ablutions, and even had an opportunity of laying down to repose themselves if they felt so inclined; but they were narrowly watched the whole time that they enjoyed the temporary privilege of this retirement to a private chamber. And there, in that chamber, they threw themselves into each other's arms, they wept, and they spoke of Linda and Beatrice, and far-off Vienna, and their beloved master; and the parents and relatives whom they were fated perhaps never to see more; and then they shudderingly and whisperingly asked each other what could be meant by the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss!

But neither was enabled to hazard even a conjecture; while their terrified looks and convulsing forms full plainly indicated that they both regarded the mystery as something appalling in its shadowy and incomprehensible outline.

At the expiration of the two hours the journey was renewed; and until sunset was it continued, with an occasional halt to procure refreshment and bait the horses. The night was passed at a hostel; and on the following morning the travellers again set out at an early hour. Throughout this second day nothing occurred deserving special mention; and the night was spent, like the preceding one, in comfortable quarters at a way-side inn. The third day's journey commenced; and in the course of an hour the party reached a wood which the two pages speedily recognised as that in which the Taborite encampment was pitched on the occasion when they accompanied their master to those head-quarters of the mighty Zitzka,

Then they sighed profoundly as they exchanged looks of deep and mournful meaning; for they thought of Linda and Beatrice, those beauteous maidens whom they had seen in that grove for the first time, and whose images had ever since remained impressed on their hearts!

The journey was continued in silence as heretofore; and in another half hour the travellers reached a point where the road was intersected by a sinuosity of the Moldau, which takes its rise in the south of Bohemia, and stretches away in a northerly course. At the spot where the great high road thus crossed the river by means of a rude wooden bridge, the stream was narrow and shallow, and the banks sloped down with so gentle a descent, that it was

both easy and safe to allow horses to enter the water to drink.

The party accordingly halted for this purpose, and turning a little aside from the main road, the priest, the armed men, and the two pages, rode their steeds down the bank into the stream.

But suddenly the Carthusian's horse shied and gave unequivocal proofs of fear, and the priest would have been thrown into the river were he not an excellent horseman. His companions looked around for the cause of the animal's alarm, and their eyes fell upon the corpse of a female, which was lying amongst some weeds in the shade of an overhanging bush.

The pages instantaneously averted their heads in disgust; the priest also reined back his horse—but the armed ruffians, familiar with death in all its ghastliest and most grisly shapes, rode towards the spot where the body lay. All on a sudden an ejaculation of mingled amazement and horror burst from the lips of the foremost; and, springing from his steed, he unhesitatingly drew the corpse upon the bank. His companions, meanwhile, recognised it also, and the exclamation, 'It is Dame Martha!' reached the ears of the Carthusian and the pages.

Father Cyprian immediately dismounted, fastened his horse to a tree, and hastened to view the corpse. It was comparatively fresh, and the features were easily to be recognised, although the countenance was somewhat swollen and livid. But if there were any uncertainty in the matter, the woman's attire placed her identity beyond a doubt; and the Carthusian, overwhelmed with amazement, ejaculated, 'It is indeed Dame Martha!'

Some unaccountable feeling of curiosity at that moment prompted the two pages to cast their looks upon the corpse, and they at once recognised the old woman who had first introduced them to the unknown mansion, their revisit to which threatened to cost them so dearly.

'Could this be an accident? was the poor creature drowned?' exclaimed Father Cyprian, speaking aloud, although in a musing manner; then recalling his recollections, he said, 'It was but a few hours previous to the incident which made these dangerous youths my prisoners, that I saw Dame Martha at the hostel near the heath.'

'By heaven! she hath been foully dealt with,' cried the armed man who had dragged the corpse ashore; and, stooping down, he drew forth the poniard which had remained in the breast, where it was plunged to the very hilt.

Father Cyprian mechanically took the dagger from his hand; but as he examined the flexible blade, and the elegantly worked silver hilt, his countenance suddenly changed, and an expression of extreme uneasiness passed over it. Then he reflected profoundly for upwards of a minute, and at length starting abruptly from his reverie, he secured the poniard beneath his gown.

Meantime the four armed men gazed upon him with deep interest and curiosity; but be it well understood that during the entire progress of this scene on the bank of the Moldau, the two pages had been watched in such a manner that they had no chance of effecting an escape by galloping away suddenly; and the ropes fastened to their ankles, and passing beneath their horses' bellies, prevented them from leaping off and trusting to the agility of their limbs.

'This occurrence,' said the Carthusian, after a long pause—and as he spoke he glanced towards the corpse, thereby intimating that he alluded to the murder of Dame Martha—'this occurrence somewhat changes my plans. I must return without delay to Prague, for if the renegade and perjured Sister Marietta be assuming the offensive, our friends in the neighborhood may be endangered. Continue ye your journey, therefore, my faithful friends,' added the priest, casting his eyes upon the four armed men consecutively; 'and let everything be accomplished precisely as if I were present to see it done.'

He spoke these last words with a significancy to which his myrmidons responded by means of looks, that showed how fully they comprehended him, and how zealous they were to perform his behest; and this dumb show on their part failed not to strike the youths with its ominous expression.

Father Cyprian was about to remount his horse, when Lionel hastily exclaimed, 'May it please your reverence to grant me a few moments' private conversation?'

'To what effect, boy?' demanded the Carthusian in a cold tone, as he eyed the page suspiciously and sternly.

'If I choose to speak aloud whatever I may have to say,' responded the youth, 'I should not have solicited an audience apart from the rest,' and he glanced towards his armed custodians.

'Stand back, then!' exclaimed the priest; and at this command the bravos retired to a short distance, leaving Lionel and Konrad together with the Carthusian. 'Now speak, and let your words be brief and to the purpose,' said the latter.

'I know not, holy father,' resumed Lionel, in a low and earnest tone, 'what doom there may be in store for my companion and myself, but so darkly menacing were your words, that we have naturally prepared ourselves for the worst. I would however beseech your reverence to reflect well ere you proceed to any fatal extremes against us; not only for *our* sake do I thus beseech you, but likewise for *your own;* inasmuch as he whom we serve has the power to wreak a deadly vengeance on those who may injure us.'

'You allude to the man calling himself Sir Ernest de Colmar?' exclaimed the Carthusian, fixing his eyes angrily upon the countenance of Lionel. 'Ah! that menace of yours shall not serve your purpose, boy; for I am not to be intimidated thus! For look you, I know more of your master than you think.'

'Ah! you know him?' ejaculated Lionel and Konrad, both as it were in the same breath.

'Yes, I know him to be an impostor and a cheat,' replied the Carthusian, with exceeding bitterness of tone.—'Having gotten possession, heaven only knows how, of a letter which I addressed some time back to his Sovereign Highness the Duke of Austria, he availed himself of that document to obtain my confidence, doubtless with a view to serve his own sinister purposes in some way or another. Then by means of a forged credential, he endeavored to pass himself off amongst the nobles of Bohemia as the representative of Duke Albert at the council. But fortunately he was detected and unmasked at that assembly.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Lionel, coloring with indignation.

'Your Reverence knows not what you say,' cried Konrad, in amazement.

'By the blessed Virgin! if you provoke me to convince you how well your master's true character is known to me,' returned the Carthusian, in a tone that was malignantly taunting and bitterly sarcastic; 'I have no objection to gratify you on that head! Look you, insolent boys, and mark well what I am about to reveal to ye. When your master arrived in Prague, he was a bearer of a letter from Lord Rodolph to the Baron of Altendorf. In that communication the young nobleman bade his father beware of Sir Ernest de Colmar. More than this he could not say, inasmuch as his letter might have been opened by him to whom its delivery was entrusted. But the hint that Lord Rodolph conveyed was sufficient to excite the suspicions of the Baron of Altendorf respecting your master. He accordingly despatched a letter secretly and speedily to Vienna, with orders to institute the most searching inquiries into the character of Sir Ernest de Colmar and all that regarded him. The agent thus employed was to devote himself strictly to this business, and to *this* only, so that his attention might not be diverted into other channels. Well, he set off, he reached Vienna, and there he remained only a single hour, for his inquiries were answered with an unexpected promptitude.'

'And those inquiries——' exclaimed Lionel.

'Interrupt me not, arrogant boy,' said the priest, his tone increasing in severity. 'You can well divine how those inquiries were answered! For the very first question put by our agent on his arrival at Vienna elicited the startling response that there was no such person known about the Ducal Court as Sir Ernest de Colmar. Not entirely satisfied with this information, the messenger repaired to the herald's office in the Ducal Chancery, and there he inspected the list of the knights of the duchy. But the name of Ernest de Colmar figured not therein! Then, without tarrying another moment in Vienna, and without deeming it necessary to ask another question, the messenger set out on his return to Prague. Thus was it that your master became known as a vile impostor; and had it not been that he received the protection of Zitzka, whose spy he doubtless is, the vengeance of the Bronzo Statue would have assuredly overtaken him ere this, despite his escape from *us*, who are its sworn instruments, on an occasion wherewith you are doubtless well acquainted.'

The Carthusian alluded to that memorable night when Sir Ernest de Colmar was rescued from his power by the Count de Rosenberg.

'Your Reverence has said much that has amazed me,' exclaimed Lionel, when the priest had done speaking; 'but some portion of your speech ad-

mits of ready explanation. In the first place, let me assure your Reverence that neither my fellow-page nor myself were acquainted with any circumstance that concerns the alleged unmasking of our beloved chieftain; nor were we aware that he had ever encountered, much less escaped from, any such peril as that mysterious and vaguely understood danger which is associated with the name of the Bronze Statue. Thus far, everything your Reverence has stated is new to us. But of *that* no matter. For the point to which it behoves me to direct the attention of your Reverence, is the aspersion you have thrown on our revered master, than whom there breathes not a nobler chieftain nor a mightier hero in Christendom.'

'Silence, false-speaking youths!' exclaimed Father Cyprian. 'No words of thine can outweigh the facts which proclaim your master an impostor, an adventurer, and a cheat! Why, your very presence in the mansion where the Princess of Bohemia dwells furnishes another proof of your chief's duplicity. Despite of the oath which he swore to me never to betray, even if he should discover, the place where her royal highness had found an asylum, he sent you thither——'

'As heaven is our witness,' ejaculated Lionel solemnly, 'Sir Ernest de Colmar gave us no clue to that mansion. We are even at this moment unacquainted with its situation; we know not its locality. Introduced thither blindfolded—in the first instance by an old woman who invited us to accompany her—in the second instance by the lady of the mansion herself——'

'Ah! is all this the real truth?' exclaimed the Carthusian, fixing his eyes penetratingly upon Lionel for a few moments—then turning them with the same keenness of observation upon Konrad. 'But the old woman of whom you have spoken——'

'Lies there, a corpse!' answered the elder page, who was acting as spokesman throughout this colloquy; and his response was given with a promptitude corresponding with the firmness and decision that marked the sincerity of all his observations.

'Be it, then, as you say,' exclaimed the priest, 'be it granted that you obtained not admission to the mansion through any promptings derived from the lips of the individual calling himself Sir Ernest de Colmar; the fact proves not that he is an honest man in other respects, nor gainsays the imputation which I have affirmed against him.'

'Oh! reverend father,' said Lionel, letting the reins fall on the horse's neck and joining his hands with exceeding earnestness of gesture, 'if I were to reveal to your ears a startling truth, would you not forego that vengeance which you have threatened to wreak upon my companion and myself? And in thus seeking to save our lives, in making you acquainted with that truth to which I have alluded, in confiding to you a secret of the grandest importance, I am well assured that my much-loved master will pardon me, for he himself is kind, and good, and merciful—and humble as Konrad and myself are, he would not allow a hair of our head to be injured!'

'What mean you? Speak!' exclaimed Father Cyprian, surveying the young page with mingled wonder and curiosity. 'But beware,' he added, immediately afterwards, his manner losing its interest and his tone its excitement, 'beware, I say, how you trifle with me, for you know not the tremendous power which I wield!'

'No, no, I am not trifling with your reverence!' cried the elder page. 'But this secret must be breathed to your ears alone; and those men——'

'They cannot hear a syllable of our discourse,' said Father Cyprian, approaching close to Lionel, who bent forward on his saddle, for the priest, be it recollected, was on foot all this time, he having dismounted in the first instance to obtain a nearer view of the corpse of Dame Martha. 'And now speak! what is the profound mystery—what is the secret to which you have alluded?'

'Draw nearer, holy father,—nearer still,' said Lionel, 'for the revelation which I am about to make, must not even be trusted to the breeze nor to the echo. In a word, Sir Ernest de Colmar——'

And the young page finished his sentence in the lowest possible whisper.

'Ah! by heaven—I understand it all!' exclaimed the Carthusian, with a start the suddenness of which indicated how completely he was wonder-stricken by the secret he had that moment learnt. 'Yes, all is clear and intelligible now! Fool, fool that I was not to suspect the real truth!'

'And now your reverence will spare Konrad and myself?' said Lionel

But the Carthusian heeded not the question. Falling into a profound reverie, he rapidly surveyed the aspect that all his schemes and interests now presented in the new light which the discovery he had just made threw upon them; and for upwards of a minute his ears and eyes were closed to all external impressions. At length, as if struck by a sudden idea which had started up from amidst the current of his thoughts, he raised his searching eyes towards Lionel's countenance, observing, 'You and your fellow-page have been initiated in the mysteries of that mansion where you found the Princess Elizabetha?'

The tell-tale blush which instantly mantled upon the cheeks of the two pages afforded a sufficient answer to the priest's question.

'And you have not as yet made any revelations on that subject to your master?' said Father Cyprian, inquiringly.

'Oh! no,—no!' responded Lionel shudderingly. 'We were bound by an oath so terrible, so solemn, and in the presence of such dreadful, ghastly, appalling witnesses——'

'Then never shall you have an opportunity of breaking that oath?' exclaimed Father Cyprian, with menacing abruptness.

And, as he gave utterance to those words, he beckoned the armed men to approach. The signal was obeyed in an instant; the youths were again surrounded by their guards; and the priest sprang upon his steed. A few rapid instructions did he whisper to the ear of the senior bravo of the party; then, wheeling his horse skilfully round, he urged his animal up the bank; and, striking into the main road once more, he galloped off in the direction of Prague.

All this latter portion of the scene occurred in less than a minute, and the two young pages found, to their bitter disappointment and increased terror, that the revelation of the secret which they hoped would prove the talisman of their safety, had only tended to confirm the vindictive priest in his dark and mysteriously terrible intentions towards them.

Exchanging looks of blank despair, the unhappy youths were constrained to resume their journey in the midst of the formidable escort; and thus, while Father Cyprian was retracing his way in a northerly direction towards the Bohemian capital, the little party continued their southern route at a rapid pace.

In a short time they reached the spot at the cross-roads where Sir Ernest de Colmar had met Father Cyprian for the first time, as related in one of the opening chapters of our narrative; but the little chapel was no longer to be seen! The place which it had occupied was strewn with its ruins, a signal proof that the Taborite Reformers had passed that way!

It was about six o'clock in the evening when the party of horsemen came in sight of Altendorf Castle, the towers of which were instantaneously recognised by the youthful pages. But now the leader of the little band struck into a bye path across the fields; and, pursuing a circuitous route, the party skirted the enclosed grounds on which the back of the Castle looked. In a short time they reached that portion of the great forest which has been so often alluded to as stretching up to the extremity of the right wing of the old feudal fortalice.

Amidst the maze of verdure did the horsemen ride for some short distance, until they reached a little chapel, which had survived the rage—most likely because it had escaped the notice—of the of the Taborites, when Zitzka led them to the subjugation of the southern provinces of Bohemia.

At this spot the party halted; and the armed men, dismounting, fastened their horses amidst the trees. They then suffered the two pages to alight; and one of the bravos departed in the direction of the castle gate. His absence lasted for upwards of half an hour; and when he returned, it was in company with an old man whom the pages instantly recognised as Hubert the steward.

The look which this functionary threw upon them showed that the recognition was mutual; and it even struck both Lionel and Konrad that an expression of compassion and sympathy flashed in that rapid glance and appeared upon the old man's lip. But if it were so, it disappeared in a moment; and the unhappy boys felt their hearts sink within them as the steward began to whisper earnestly apart with the leader of the band.

In a few minutes, during which Lionel and Konrad endured the most torturing suspense, Hubert accosted them, saying, 'You must submit to be bound,

young men, ere you accompany me whither I am about to lead you; but I warn you that if the slightest cry for succor should escape the tongue of either, a gag shall instantly be applied to the lips of the offender.'

Having thus spoken in a tone which, though cold and severe, had the least, least tremulousness in it, Hubert turned abruptly away from the two youths, whom the bravos thereupon hastened to bind in such a manner that though rendered powerless for resistance or escape, they were nevertheless enabled to walk.

When this process was completed, Hubert raised a trap-door of the little chapel, and a descent of stone steps appeared.

Never—never had there been such a moment in the lives of the unfortunate youths as this one, when they were commanded to follow Hubert down that entrance into a subterranean passage leading to heaven only knew what horror, what torture, what frightful doom! For now that thing which for three nights and three days had haunted them like a demon-spectre—that Bronze Statue which had been proclaimed the instrument and the means of their fate, assumed a more tremendous shape to their imagination and became more distinctly appalling to their mental view!

Such was the fearful condition of their minds—such was the harrowing state of their souls, as the unhappy youths descended the stone steps leading to the subterranean which they beheld stretching away into total darkness. For it was yet bright day upon the earth, and the beams of the sun, as the glorious orb was sinking towards its western home, illuminated the interior of the chapel and penetrated even beyond the bottom of the staircase of solid masonry.

Hubert, who led the way, now lighted a lamp, which he took from a niche in the damp wall of the subterranean, which went shelving down with a steep incline. The youth followed him, and two of the armed men brought up the rear.

A solemn silence prevailed, broken only by the echoes of the footsteps of those who were thus threading the passage; but at every pace which Konrad and Lionel took, some new idea of impending horror started up in their minds, making their blood run cold in its crimson channels, and their brows throb with the fever of the most agonizing, the most poignant excitement.

In a few minutes the subterranean passage, which first sloped downward, next proceeded straight, and then rose with a steep ascent, terminated at a small door. This Hubert opened by means of a key which he had about him; and the party entered a place which, by the feeble beaming of the lamp borne by the old steward, struck the youths as being a subterranean prison; for the low vaulted roof and the groined arches were supported by massive pillars, and the echoes raised by the footsteps of the party, reverberated again and again, until they died away in the sinister and dreaded distance, which was shrouded in impenetrable darkness.

But they had not advanced many paces into this subterranean, ere the two pages began to perceive white things, of ominous shape, gleaming ghastly from amid the obscurity, and likewise black objects standing out as it were in ebon gloom from the darkness that shrouded the place; and they soon became aware that they were in a vast succession of vaults, filled with tombs, some of white and some of black marble.

Skirting the low but massive wall from which the groined arches rose at short intervals, Hubert led the way as far as an iron grating that communicated with a wide and handsome marble staircase, fronting the great central avenue which divided the place of sepulchre. Turning into that avenue, the steward continued to lead the way, amid the numberless tombs that appeared on either side; and all this time not a word was spoken, not a syllable fell from the lips of a soul.

At the extremity of the avenue another door was opened; and now the youths were conducted into that chamber where the infernal machinery developed its appalling features to their view.

Aghast they stood, gazing upon it, so amazed and horror-stricken that their minds were scarcely capable of forming any conclusion relative to its use; although the conviction was carried to their souls that the diabolical mechanism was connected with the awful doom which hung over their own heads, and to which every step they were taking brought them nearer and nearer.

Fascinated by the dread machinery, they would have stood to contemplate it

in the same manner as the bird or the mouse is transfixed by the eyes of the serpent; but the armed men urged them on, and Hubert led the way along a narrow passage, then up a flight of granite steps, to a room of moderate dimensions, where numerous jars, bottles, and implements stood upon a table.

This chamber was hastily traversed; another short, low, and vaulted passage was threaded, and a door admitted the party into a spacious place where the light of the lamp borne by Hubert brought out as it were from the darkness the gleaming outlines of a vast colossal figure!

Powers of heaven! with reeling brains and hearts that sickened as if the very life were shrinking from them, did the unhappy youths thus find themselves at length in the presence of the Bronze Statue!

With wild looks and choking accents did they endeavor to murmur a prayer the instant the conviction reached their souls that the giant-image was a representative of the Blessed Virgin; but the armed men forced them rudely away from its vicinage, compelled them to traverse the spacious apartment, and forced them to follow Hubert into a small circular chamber, where a block of granite served for a hassock in front of a crucifix standing in a niche.

'Kneel, young men—kneel!' said the old steward, in a solemn tone; 'kneel, and make your peace with heaven, for in a few minutes your career will close upon earth!'

Stupified with the numbness of an unspeakable terror, the unhappy youths mechanically obeyed the directions of the steward; and kneeling down on the granite block, they endeavored to pray in the presence of that rude stone crucifix.

But their tongues clave to the roofs of their mouths, and their throats were parched as if they had swallowed ashes.

Suddenly a bell rang in some distant passage or vault, and in a few minutes a door opened opposite to the one by which the party had entered the circular chamber.

The dismal sound of the bell had startled the youths somewhat from that stupefaction of the senses into which they had fallen; and hearing the door open, they turned their eyes in that direction with a fearful presentiment that new horrors were in store for them.

Nor were they mistaken; for, slowly emerging from the darkness of a passage with which that door communicated, three tall figures, completely muffled in black gowns, and with their faces wrapped in the funereal cowls, appeared upon the threshold.

'Wherefore were we summoned?' demanded the foremost, in a deep sepulchral voice which sounded as if spoken by a corpse ascending a grave.

'To inflict the vengeance of the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss!' was Hubert's solemn response.

The youths heard and saw no more; stricken senseless with ineffable terror, they fell back from the granite block on which they were kneeling, and dropped heavily upon the stone-paved floor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE STEWARD AND THE MUFFLED FIGURES.

When Lionel and Konrad awoke to consciousness again, they found themselves supported in the arms of the three tall figures muffled in black gowns; and the shuddering looks which the unhappy youths cast about them, showed that they were still in the circular chamber. Hubert, holding the lamp up, was gazing upon them with an indefinable expression: it might be compassion, or it might be a deeply concentrated gloating over their wretchedness, they knew not which!

On one side stood the two armed men who had followed them down into the dread subterraneans of Altendorf Castle: on he other was the stone crucifix in the niche, with the granite hassock near.

It was not, then, a hideous dream through which the pages had passed: no, Oh! no, it was an appalling reality; and they had indeed beheld that accursed machinery, yes, and looked likewise upon the Bronze Statue!

Oh! language has power to concentrate all the force of emphasis and all the meaning of epithets sternly strong, and the artist's pencil may depict the most harrowing scenes which the human imagination can conjure up: but the world has no tongue and the limner has no ability to convey an adequate portraiture of that tearless horror and immeasurable despair which fastened upon and enwrapt the youths as their eyes thus opened again and memory resumed its empire.

One of the muffled figures held a small phial in his hand; and by a certain burning taste which remained in the mouths of the pages, they instantaneously perceived that some potent fluid had been used to restore them to consciousness. The cords had likewise been removed from their limbs for the purpose of facilitating their recovery: and thus did it seem as if an exquisite refinement of human cruelty had brought them back to life in order that they might be delivered up to a terrible death!

Rising to their feet, and thus disengaging themselves from the support of those three figures whose funeral presence appalled them—Lionel and Konrad threw themselves into each other's arms; and, believing that death was at hand, they gave vent to a passionate outburst of grief, while sobbing forth their sad farewells forever!

"This is unworthy of us," at length said the elder page, obedient to an impulse of suddenly reviving courage, "Let us meet our fate with Christian fortitude."

"Oh! if it were in the battle-field, Lionel," exclaimed Konrad, in a tone of mingled bitterness and agony, "we would not disgrace our sex, our nation, or our illustrious master. But to die thus, in the bowels of the earth, unseen, unpitied, unprayed for. Oh! it is *this*, it is *this* which rends my soul with anguish and pierces me to the very quick."

"Are there no means of moving ye to compassion?" demanded Lionel, glancing earnestly round upon Hubert and the armed men, but withdrawing his looks shudderingly from those three muffled figures whose very presence seemed to stagnate the current of his blood: for in spite of himself the thought wound itself cold and snake-like round his heart, that those black cowls so completely drawn over them concealed either the heads of skeletons or the countenances of the dead!

"Compassion is not a word to be mentioned here!" spoke one of those appalling mysterious shapes, in a voice which appeared to come from some hollow depth: and, O merciful God! how those cavern-like ones crept slowly, slowly, slowly through the blood of the two young pages who were thus enduring the gradient agonies of ten thousand deaths.

For the mighty torrent overwhelms and sweeps away its victims at once; there is a shriek, a struggle, and all is over. Death in that case is no torturer! But when the water is suffered to fall drop by drop upon the exposed and shaven head, and always precisely upon the same spot, then the anguish becomes excruciating, maddening, goading, and body and soul writhe, and twist, and convulse beneath the hellish infliction. In this case it is that Death is the torturer!

So was it with Lionel and Konrad. For if their oppressors had taken their lives at once either by the halter or the sword, they would have met their fate boldly, well knowing that it was like a rapid and desperate plunge into a whirling torrent where annihilation must be instantaneous; but to march them down from the bright sunshine into the bowels of the earth, to conduct them amidst the awful silence of tombs, to lead them through a place where a frightful mechanism harrowed their souls, to confront them suddenly with that Bronze Statue which was the Virgin in seeming but might be a Fiend in sooth, and then to introduce them to a rude chapel which appeared the very threshold of Death's dark and ghastly kingdom, and where three sable-muffled shapes stole in upon them, noiselessly, as black snakes and ominously as gliding spectres from the grave, oh! this was the torture of the dropping water that maddened, and goaded, and frenzied, and excruciated ere the crowning consummation came!

And then, Almighty God! had they heard aright? Those words, those fatal words which bade them speak not of compassion there, words which extinguished in a moment the last flickering of hope's lamp in their souls, and enveloped them in the stupendous darkness of despair!

'Konrad, farewell! once more I bid thee farewell!' murmured Lionel, after a pause of nearly a minute, during which a profound silence prevailed, and every one was motionless as a statue in that circular chapel.

'Farewell, Lionel—dear Lionel—farewell!' sobbed the younger page, throwing himself upon his comrade's breast and weeping bitterly.

'Courage, Konrad, courage!' exclaimed Lionel, in a tone full of holy soothing. 'God will avenge us sooner or later; for He will permit no iniquity to remain long unpunished.'

'Oh! if we could only forward a last word, or some memorial, to our beloved master,' cried the younger page, withdrawing himself from his friend's em-

brace, 'and likewise to those innocent and lovely maidens whose images have dwelt in our hearts.'

'Linda and Beatrice will never know our fate, Konrad,' interrupted Lionel; 'and it were better, oh! far better that it should be thus!'

'Time is wearing on, young men,' said Hubert, in a low and even tremulous tone; 'and once more must I commend ye to your devotions.'

The pages grasped each other's hands for a moment, exchanged looks of encouragement and consolation, and then sank once more upon their knees in the presence of the rude stone crucifix.

'Now may ye retire, my good friends,' observed Hubert, addressing himself to the two armed men; 'for your guardianship over these youths is required no longer. They are safe in the custody of the sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue; and it is unlawful for ye, men of the sword as ye are, to witness the ceremony of the Virgin's Kiss.'

'True, worthy Hubert,' responded one of Father Cyprian's bravos; 'we know our duties in that respect, and we should have withdrawn the moment we had delivered the youths into the hands of the three executioners, had they not fainted away. Curiosity prompted us to remain to see that they recovered—'

'And ye may make the usual report to your master, good friends,' interrupted Hubert, with evident impatience.

'Yes, we shall assure his reverence that we duly surrendered our prisoners into the keeping of your worthy self and the executioners,' observed the bravo who had previously spoken. 'But where is the lamp to guide me and my comrade back through the vaults and passages? For often as we have threaded them, we know them not sufficiently, I ween, to be able to traverse them in the dark.'

'I will light you through the chamber of the Statue into the room where the bronzing implements are kept; and there you can procure another lamp.'

Thus speaking, Hubert led the way from the circular chapel, followed by the two armed men. Yes, and followed also by the looks of the two pages; for the door communicating with the Chamber of the Statue was left open, and an irresistible impulse, amounting to a horrible fascination, compelled Lionel and Konrad thus to plunge their terrified gaze into the apartment where the rays of the lamp which Hubert carried speedily flashed upon the colossal image.

Another moment, and the light disappeared through the door leading into the passage communicating with the room that served as a workshop.

And now darkness and silence prevailed in the circular chapel; darkness and silence enveloped the fated youths, a darkness as ebon as if they themselves were blind, and a silence as profound as if the very respiration were suspended.

And horrible thoughts had already swept back into the minds of the two pages, dispelling the halo of resignation and holy confidence which devotion had for a moment shed round their souls; for the dialogue which passed between Hubert and the armed men, though carried on in a low whispering, had reached their ears, and from that conversation had they learnt that the three sable figures were styled *Executioners!*

That such they in reality were, had been previously more than suspected by the youths. The solemn answer returned by Hubert when the foremost of the black shapes had demanded wherefore they were summoned, had not only confirmed that idea, but had likewise struck the two pages with the consternation which had rendered them senseless for a time. But still there was something so awful, so truly appalling in the open and undisguised mention of the word *executioners*—something so terribly calculated to freeze the blood in the veins, make the flesh creep upon the bones, and cause the hair to stand on end, that it struck with the effect of an ice-shaft to the very heart's-core of each fated youth, reviving in an instant all the horrors which religious devotion and holy reliance were subduing.

Thus was it that the darkness seemed terrible, and the silence was fraught with consternation to Lionel and Konrad. Still they knelt, side by side, upon the granite block; still their hands were clasped, and still their countenances were turned in the direction of that door which communicated with the Chamber of the Statue. There was not even a rustle of garments nor a sound of breathing in the circular chapel. Deep as was the darkness, so profound was the silence that prevailed,—and in that darkness and that silence did they appear to be entombed!

And quickly—Oh! quickly sped the fancy to conjure up imaginary horrors in addition to those that were real and imminent. For the youths felt their brains growing dizzy and whirling; and it seemed to them that the three figures

muffled in the black gowns were slowly and noiselessly advancing towards them —hemming them in—closing upon them—multiplying in number—surrounding them—and extending their arms towards them! The same delusions arose in the mind of Lionel and in that of Konrad at the same instant, progressed simultaneously, and reached the same climax at the same moment. They drew closer to each other, as they fancied that the wall of black shapes was closing in around them; they endeavored to shrink up into as narrow a space as possible—they crouched down—the illusion gained upon them; an appalling consternation was literally crushing out their very life, as the foul air of a cavern narrows and presses on to extinction the flame of the lamp around which it is gradually becoming heavier and heavier!

O God! the horrors, the ineffable horrors of this cruel delusion under which the unfortunate youths were laboring! It was the refinement of mortal anguish, the essence of human excruciation. Their brows throbbed violently, a cold perspiration burst out all over them, it was a torture to which the rack were as nothing, that they were enduring. The very excess of this indescribable agony unlocked their tongues at last; and from the lips of each broke a shriek which appeared to come from the bottom of their souls!

At the same instant a gleam of light flashed upon the portentous obscurity, which had engendered such a terrible phantasmagoria; and Hubert, with the lamp in his hand, re-appeared upon the threshold of the door opening into the Chamber of the Statue from the passage communicating with the workshop.

The old man started visibly as those piercing shrieks met his ears; and, hurrying towards the circular chamber, he demanded in a rapid tone the cause of the sudden lamentations.

Starting from their crouching, kneeling posture, the youths threw terrified looks around them; but when they beheld the steward with his lamp on one side, and the three muffled figures motionless as statues on the other, they perceived that they had been the victims of a wandering and excited imagination. Then, overcome by the suddenness of the relief which they thus experienced, they staggered against the wall as if about to sink down in another fit; but yielding to the impulse of other feelings, as rapidly awakened, they threw themselves into each other's arms and wept plenteously.

'Oh! surely, surely the bitterness of death is now passed!' exclaimed Konrad.

'God grant that it may be!' cried the elder page, with the fervor of a martyr.

'Death! No, no, my poor boys!' said the old steward, in a tone that indicated emotions powerfully excited. 'You have been tortured too much already, and God forgive me for having been compelled to torture you so long!'

The announcement of joy and hope may come with the same thunder-bolt effect as the voice of doom and the knell of fate. Thus was it on the present occasion! Amazed, bewildered, fearful to trust their ears, and trembling with apprehension lest they were now becoming the victims of a different and brighter delusion, Lionel and Konrad stood gasping for breath, sustaining each other's quivering forms as well as they might; and with their eyes fixed, Oh! language cannot describe with how intense an anxiety, upon the countenance of the steward!

But that countenance had become unmistakeably benevolent in expression; there was no longer any doubt as to the nature of the light which shone in the eyes, nor the significancy of that wreathing of the lips. Sorrow—deep sorrow for all that had just occurred—good tidings for the present, and hope for the future, those were all read in that old man's lineaments now. And tears, too —Oh! yes, tears were trickling down his cheeks, big drops shining in the lamp-light!

And, wonder upon wonder, the three figures a moment before so awful and ominous, threw aside their sable cloaks; and instead of revealing the ferocious countenances and diabolical aspect which fancy invariably associates with executioners, they appeared in the form of three middle-aged men, with melancholy looks, and having nothing terrible about them. Bearing a remarkable resemblance to each other, and three naturally fine and even handsome men, despite of their pale and careworn faces, they appeared to be brothers; indeed, it was impossible to avoid receiving this impression even at the first and most casual glance thrown upon them, as they were thus standing together.

But was it the reality? or was it a delusion? Had the old steward pro-

claimed life and hope to those two boys who an instant before were preparing for death? and were the three brothers who had just thrown off the cloaks, men having a friendly disposition and a benevolent purpose, instead of being the accursed instruments of a vague and terrible vengeance?

Oh! it was indeed the truth, it was no delusion! Those tears that rolled down Hubert's cheeks, and the kind manner and reassuring looks with which the brothers approached the youths,—all denoted that some signal change, as wondrous as it was at present unaccountable, had taken place in their destiny.

'Pardon us, dear youths, pardon me and my companions here,' exclaimed the old steward, 'for the misery, the torture, and the anguish which we have made you endure! But it was necessary to sustain certain appearances in the presence of those two ruffians who were ere now with us and who are the agents of a diabolical system whereof you will learn more hereafter.'

'But the Bronze Statue,' demanded Lionel, still scarcely able to credit his ears and his eyes, 'is it a meaningless thing, associated with threats that are uttered only to alarm and never put into execution?'

'Alas! alas! would that it were indeed as harmless and as innocent as you imagine!' exclaimed Hubert. 'Oh! if these walls could speak, if this solid masonry could send forth articulate sounds, what appalling tales would there be to tell!'

And the old man writhed visibly under the influence of the thoughts which now crowded in upon his brain; and the perspiration burst forth in large drops upon his forehead.

'I see that I have distressed you by my query,' exclaimed Lionel, hastening to take Hubert's hand and press it cordially; 'whereas I ought to testify the most heartfelt gratitude towards you for the hope to which your lips have given utterance! But tell me once more that our lives are saved——'

'God forbid that I should injure a hair of your head!' cried the old steward, profoundly affected.

'Not for worlds should you sustain wrong or violence at our hands,' said the three brothers, speaking as it were in the same breath.

Then Lionel and Konrad, no longer doubting that they were indeed spared, threw themselves into each other's arms and wept for joy, as ere now they had sobbed in the bitterness of their heart's anguish; and, having thus felicitated each other, they embraced the old steward and the three brethren in their turns, pouring forth at the same time the most fervent expressions of gratitude and thankfulness.

When the excitement of the sudden and most unexpected deliverance had found itself a vent in this gush of feelings, Hubert said to them, 'Fair youths, ye have doubtless had enough of this terrible place; follow me, and although I am not about to conduct you to any great distance, it will at all events be to a more pleasant chamber than the one where you have undergone so much excruciating mental torture.'

Thus speaking, the old steward led the way from the circular chapel, not by the door conducting into the Chamber of the Statue, but by the one facing it. This latter door, as the reader will remember, communicated with a vaulted corridor. But, instead of threading the passage, Hubert pressed a spring in that part of the wall immediately facing the entrance to the circular chamber; and a mass of the solid masonry instantly opened in the form of a door; a contrivance so admirably arranged that when this stone portal was closed, it fitted with such tightness and accuracy in its setting, that nothing short of the most searching scrutiny aided by a previously exciting suspicion, that some such means of communication existed in that very spot, could possibly detect it.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BROTHERHOOD.

The apartment into which this door of solid masonry opened, was spacious and lofty. At the farther extremity there were four long narrow loop-holes, protected inside with wooden shades, sloping upward from the bottom part of each aperture, so that while a free current of air was admitted from these loop-holes, the room was protected from any disagreeable draught. Another advantage arising from the arrangement of the shades, was that, inasmuch as they looked upon the moat at the back part of the castle, no one walking upon the opposite bank could possibly see into the chamber which we are describ-

ing. But as these loop-holes were rather serviceable for air than light, three lamps, suspended to the ceiling, shed their mellow lustre throughout the apartment.

The room was comfortably furnished, and was evidently fitted up to accommodate numerous guests. A large table occupied the centre, and around it there were placed at least fifty chairs. Upon the shelves in the apartment appeared as many drinking-horns and platters, together with several dishes, and the various articles necessary for the housekeeping of a considerable number of persons.

In addition to the huge portal of masonry already described, this room had eight doors, four on one side and four on the other; but as they were all closed at the time when the two youths entered, they obtained at the moment no idea of what nature the chambers were with which they communicated, The large apartment itself was unoccupied when they were introduced to it; and yet, as already observed, there was every appearance of accommodation for numerous guests.

Hubert bade the youths be seated, and the three brothers hastened to set wine, fruits, and other refreshments before them. They then retired by one of the doors just alluded to, and the two pages were thus left alone with the old steward.

'Drink a cup of wine, fair boys,' said this functionary; 'and partake of a morsel of food. I will then give you certain explanations which will prepare you for a new mode of life.'

These words struck ominously upon the ears of Lionel and Konrad, and caused them to start as if with a convulsive spasm; for it instantly occurred to them that although their lives were saved, yet their liberties were at stake.

They accordingly hastened to drink some wine and partake of other refreshment, so that the old steward might commence his explanations as soon as possible; and when he perceived that they had made an end of their repast, he addressed them in the following terms:

'Fair youths, your manner has already convinced me that you have foreseen a part of that destiny which is in store for you. It is true that your lives are saved, at the expense of your liberties. Henceforth must ye remain dead to the world, unless indeed the happy day should arrive——'

'Ah! then there is hope even in this new misfortune which awaits us!' exclaimed Lionel, catching at the old man's words.

'Oh! speak, speak, good Hubert!' cried Konrad. 'Relieve us, if possible from despair. You say that we must remain dead to the world, unless——'

'Unless some happy incident should so change the position of affairs,' added the old steward, 'as to annihilate the power of the Bronze Statue and thereby restore *you* and *many others* to the enjoyment of freedom."

'And should no such fortunate occurrence arise?' demanded Konrad, now completely sick at heart.

'Then, alas! the remainder of your lives must be spent in this place,' responded the old steward in a tone of deep solemnity.

'What, imprisonment for life!' ejaculated Konrad, starting from his seat. 'Oh! no—no, you could not be so cruel—it is impossible—impossible!'

'Consider, good Hubert,' broke in Lionel, 'we are young—oh! so very young to be snatched away from the great world! We have fond parents still living, relations and friends who are anxious concerning our welfare; and a thousand, thousand inducements to make us cling to the busy active life from which you would tear us away!'

'My poor boys, you wring tears from my eyes,' said the old man, in a voice that was weak and tremulous through emotions profoundly agitated, 'but I am unable to give you consolation. Reflect for a minute ere you blame me, and ask yourselves from what I have saved you! But you know not, you cannot guess, you are unable to divine the hideous nature of that death to which an atrocious tyranny condemned you, and from which I have rescued you. Were you fully enlightened on this head, you would throw yourselves at my feet and worship me as your guardian angel.—Imprisonment for life, immurement in the living tomb of these apartments, separation from the great and busy world without for the remainder of your days; oh! all this were nothing, nothing in comparison with the appalling doom whence I have snatched you. Take all the horrors which the imagination may devise—take all the cruelties which the devilish ingenuity of man has ever conceived,—mingle them together, concentrate them, extract their essence, and then you will form some idea of the hideous nature of that death

which you have just escaped. The writhing anguish of being flayed alive; the awful pangs of the rack; the excruciating agonies of being impaled while living; the unspeakable tortures endured alike by mind and body when enveloped in the folds of a mighty serpent that licks its victim over with its lambent tongue ere it swallows him,—all these exquisite sufferings, combined and condensed so as to be experienced by one and the same individual, would have been outvied and excelled by that vengeance from which I snatched you —the vengeance of the Bronze Statue!'

'You alarm me; my God! you alarm me now more than ever,' murmured Konrad, whose ashy cheeks, white quivering lips, shaking limbs, and wildly staring eyes denoted the indescribable horror that had taken possession of him.

'Yes; your words strike like a pestilential sickness upon my very heart,' added Lionel, his own courage completely giving way at the appalling picture which the old man drew, and which, vague though it were, was as terrible as if its outlines had been traced with a pencil dipped in fire or seared with red hot iron upon the brain of the listeners.

'And if I thus agonise and torture you with descriptions so dreadful and delineations so transcendantly frightful, resumed the old steward, his voice now becoming firm in accent though still remaining profoundly mournful, 'If I thus endeavor to call to my aid the most thrilling metaphors and all the strongest epithets to convey to your comprehension some idea of the tremendous doom which you have escaped, it is simply to place in comparatively bright and glowing colors the destiny which now awaits you. For what are eternal imprisonment; separation from father, mother, and friends; exile from the world of flowers, and fruits, and sunshine, and lovely woman's smiles, oh! what are all these when compared with the fate whence you have just been snatched? And now, fair youths, in order that you may be convinced of the truth of what I am saying, and that you may learn to appreciate the blessings of life, even though doomed to be passed within these walls, I will reveal and explain to you the awful mysteries connected with the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss. Follow me!'

Thus speaking, Hubert took up the lamp and led the way brck again through the circular chapel, to the vast and gloomy apartment where the colossal image of the Virgin stood.

* * * * *
* * * * *

Ten minutes had elapsed, and then back to the room where the preceding discourse had taken place, staggered the two young pages, pale, ghastly, and laboring under so terrible a consternation that the workings of their countenances, handsome though they naturally were, rendered them hideous and awful to contemplate.

Like galvanized corpses did they seem; dread horror swayed their entire forms, from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet, horror unspeakable; horror that defies human language to depict and human imagination to conceive!

Placing the lamp hastily upon the table, Hubert poured them out each a brimming cup of wine; and the youths drank the exhilirating liquor at a draught.

Then did the color slowly return to their cheeks and their lips, and the wildness of their gaze settled down into looks where reason was expressed once more; for at first it appeared as if their senses had abandoned them, so tremendous was the fright which they had undergone.

And the old steward, too, was pale and agitated, and his hand trembled nervously as he filled the wine-cups for the two pages and then a bumper for himself; and thus several minutes elapsed ere either of the three recovered sufficient composure to speak a word.

'Merciful heavens!' at length murmured Konrod, writhing beneath the infliction of an *idea*, or rather the remembrance of the revelations which had been made to him; 'is it possible that I can be awake—that I am laboring under no delusion—that I have seen what I fancy I have seen—and that the infernal ingenuity of man could have reached an extreme which is calculated to furnish hints even to Satan himself?'

'Alas! alas! it is no delusion,' said Lionel, in a tone of extreme bitterness; 'what we have seen is a reality, and what Hubert has told us is true—appallingly true! But oh! thou good old man, to have saved us from that tremendous doom!' he cried, embracing the steward with passionate enthusiasm—an example which was immediately followed by Konrad. 'If we serve

thee by day and by night—become thy slaves until the cold hand of Death shall be laid upon us, and prove more obedient to thee than ever we were even to our own parents—still should we be unable to convey an adequate sense of the boundless gratitude which fills our souls.'

'Yes,' said Konrad, taking up the discourse with equal fervor, 'we must not repine now at the destiny on which we are entering. Though henceforth dead to the world—though doomed perhaps to linger out the rest of our existence in this place—yet we are bound to be thankful for that salvation which leaves us even the enjoyment of such a life. Fear not, then, good Hubert, that any more repinings will fall from our lips. With comparative contentment shall we now enter into that brotherhood of which thou hast spoken—a brotherhood consisting of those whom thou hast saved from the vengeance of the Bronze Statue.'

'But if at times we may seem mournful, and if a hasty word of regret should escape our tongues,' said Lionel, 'you will attribute it, good Hubert, to a natural and irrepressible longing that our worthy master and our dear parents should at least be made acquainted with the fact that we are alive, though invisible to them—still in existence, though doomed perhaps never more to behold nor be beholden by them——'

'Alas! alas! my dear young friends,' interrupted Hubert, 'I have already explained to you how absolutely impossible it is that any communication, even the slightest, the faintest, the vaguest, can be made to those whom you love, and who must regret your disappearance, to them so unaccountable. Dead to the world, in all respects, must you remain—dead to all save those whom you will meet within these walls, dead to everything save the routine of an existence passed herein!'

At this moment one of the side doors opened, and the pages started in affright. It seemed as if fresh horrors were in store for them, inasmuch as a figure clothed in white and pale as a corpse made her appearance.

'Behold the excellent lady whose benevolence has rescued so many lives from the infernal vengeance of the Bronze Statue!' exclaimed Hubert.

Lionel and Konrad turned once more upon the white figure those eyes which they had at first shudderingly averted; and, the influence of a momentary terror having passed away, they no longer beheld her through the false and distorted medium of their startled fancies. On the contrary, they now saw advancing towards them a lady whose countenance was free from all vital tint, it was true—but whose lineaments retained the traces of great beauty, and whose features expressed a holy mildness and beatific amiability.

Her vesture, white as snow, and seeming at first to be the garments of the grave, proved to be the raiment of a nun of the Carmelite order; and in her whole demeanor there was something plaintively touching and mournfully dignified, now that the pages were enabled to observe her unbiassed by the sway of superstitious terror.

'Good youths,' said the White Lady, in a voice which corresponded in touching softness with her looks, 'I do not tell you that ye are welcome here, because that were a mockery of a sorrow most natural, and of regrets most legitimate on your part. But this much I may aver, that every kindness which, under circumstances, can possibly be shown you, shall ye receive—yes, until death or a happier deliverance——'

The lady paused, deep sobs choked her utterance, and the youths, falling at her feet, took her thin pale hands and touched them respectfully with their lips.

'Lady, give not way to affliction now,' said Hubert, in a tone of mingled veneration and entreaty; 'but let us hope that the mission of that dear girl to Prague——'

'Oh! that I could be as sanguine as you, my faithful friend, in this respect!' interrupted the White Lady, addressing herself to Hubert, while gently compelling the pages to rise from their suppliant posture. 'At the same time,' she added solemnly, 'I am well aware that heaven often works out its aims by means the most marvellous, and by agents the most humble; and, despite of years of bitter affliction, my soul cherishes so much confidence in the Almighty, and such illimitable faith in His goodness, His power, and His wisdom, that there are moments when I abandon myself to hope,—moments which contrast strangely and thrillingly with the dark intervals of mournfulness and sorrowing.'

'Oh! lady, talk not of grief and anguish!' exclaimed Lionel, in an impassioned tone; 'but speak to us of hope and sunny prospects! Already do I

feel as if you were the arbitress of our destinies—as if your prayers would avail on high!'

'Yes, there is hope everywhere!' said the White Lady. 'To the mariner whom the wave is about to engulf; to the hermit whose Alpine home the avalanche is about to envelope in its icy shroud; to the traveller advancing at dark midnight towards the edge of the precipice; to the criminal doomed to die; to the inmate of the dungeon-cell; oh! yes, to each and all there is hope; and it were blasphemy, impiety, and crime to affirm that there is not hope for *us* likewise!'

Neither Hubert nor the pages had time to give any response to these cheering and consoling words; for the four doors on that side of the room facing the one where the White Lady had appeared, were now thrown open, and upwards of thirty men came forth into the spacious apartment. They were all clad in dark raiment; old and young, care and sorrow had traced their lines upon every countenance—lightly in some cases, more deeply in others; but a pious resignation appeared to shed its beams upon the whole brotherhood.

Advancing towards the White Lady, they saluted her with the profoundest respect, mingled with veneration, and she presented Lionel and Konrad to them in a few touching and appropriate words. The foremost of the company, who were likewise the oldest, embraced the youths with a demonstration of deep sympathy; and amongst the group they speedily recognised the three brethren who had originally appeared to them in the sable garments, and ostensibly fulfilling the duties of executioners.

And now the doors opened on the other side of the apartment, and forth came some eighteen or twenty females, clad in the white raiment of the Carmelite order.

A plentiful, but plain and homely meal was spread upon the table; and the numerous company took their seats at the board, the White Lady presiding.

Then, as Lionel and Konrad beheld the perfect propriety which prevailed, and listened to the edifying conversation that accompanied the repast, they could not help contrasting in their own minds the behaviour of the male and female guests now gathered together, with that of the brilliant assemblage to which they had been twice introduced at that mansion near Prague *where the silver bell tinkled at midnight!*

CHAPTER XLII.

GLORIA AND ANGELA.

We must now return to Sir Ernest de Colmar, whom we left at the moment when he took leave of Gloria in the grove after the death of Dame Martha.

Slowly and mournfully did the knight retrace his way to the Golden Falcon, and during his walk thither, various and conflicting were the thoughts that occupied his attention.

In the first place he deplored—bitterly deplored the deed which the Daughter of Glory had perpetrated; for even although she had struck the blow, as he believed, in self-defence, yet the fact that there was blood upon her brow appeared to turn the sunny radiance of her transcendant beauty into a crimson halo! After loving her as a sister for Satanais' sake, De Colmar could not conceal from himself the startling truth that the interest he had previously experienced in her was considerably subdued, if not entirely destroyed, by the sanguinary occurrence of that fatal noon.

And now he could not help contrasting the resplendent Daughter of Glory with the modest and retiring Angela Wildon—the magnificent creature of nineteen with the bashful maiden of three-and-twenty—the superb lady, whose beauty dazzled and bewildered the senses, with the unpretending young woman whose charms awoke feelings of the most melting tenderness.

The comparison which De Colmar thus mentally drew between Gloria and Angela, gradually led him to reflect upon the incident that had so recently made him the savior of the rustic maiden's life; and he now found leisure to wonder how she could have possibly been placed in such jeopardy. Had she accidentally fallen into the river? or had she experienced foul play? These questions could only be answered by herself the next time he should see her; but they reminded him of all she had told him on the previous night respecting Father Cyprian—and he conceived it to be very possible that the priest might in some manner be connected with her perilous adventure.

The remembrance of Angela's communications in reference to the Carthusian now struck the knight's mind in another sense; for he suddenly recollected that he had not uttered, during the interview with Gloria, a single

word to put her upon her guard against the hostile intentions cherished by Father Cyprian. This matter had entirely escaped his memory; the sanguinary tragedy which occurred upon the bank of the Moldau, had engaged all his thoughts, and his interview with the Daughter of Glory had been so agitated throughout, that in the excitement produced by the immediate occurrence, all past topics were forgotten.

The Golden Falcon was in sight when it thus flashed to De Colmar's mind that he had been guilty of a grievous oversight in not warning Gloria against the machinations and intrigues of Father Cyprian. At first he thought of turning back and retracing his way to the grove in the midst of which her pavilion was situated; but then he remembered that she had bade him farewell '*until the sixth morning hence*'—an unmistakable intimation that she did not expect to see him again until the period of their departure for Vienna. A certain sense of loathing and abhorrence which had sprung up in his mind despite of himself, and the experience of which gave him pain, likewise rendered him unwilling to seek another interview with her that day; and yet it was absolutely necessary that she should be warned against the Carthusian.

An idea struck him! He would send one of his pages with a note or message. For surely the youths must have returned by this late hour in the day, after being absent all night!

But the hurried inquiry which Sir Ernest de Colmar put to Master Templin. on crossing the threshold of the Golden Falcon, elicited the alarming intelligence that Lionel and Konrad had not re-appeared; and the knight now grew very seriously uneasy. The landlord observed the cloud which settled upon the warrior's brow, and ventured to drop a few disjointed hints to the effect that 'young men were wild at times;' 'Prague had pleasures as well as other cities,' and so forth. Sir Ernest was too deeply absorbed in painful thought, arising from the protracted absence of his pages, to notice the well-meant attempts of the host to dissipate his fears concerning them; but being unable to adopt any remedial measure in the affair, he was compelled to fall back upon the hope that they had found some clue to the princess's abode and did not choose to desist from following it up to the end.

Thus endeavoring to reassure himself, the knight again turned his thoughts in the direction of Gloria; and he was more than half resolved to retrace his steps without delay to the grove, when it struck him that it would be perhaps more prudent, as it was certainly more convenient at the time, to forward the necessary warning to her through the medium of the Captain-General of the Taborites.

To the Castle of Prague he accordingly repaired; and, having immediately obtained an audience of Zitzka, he communicated to him word for word the discourse which Angela Wildon had overheard between Father Cyprian and Dame Martha at the tavern on the preceding evening. The Taborite chief expressed his gratitude in fitting terms for the intelligence thus imparted; and De Colmar took his leave of the grim warrior, to whom he spoke not a single sentence respecting the affairs of Bohemia during this brief interview.

Scarcely had the knight quitted the castle, when Zitzka mounted his horse and repaired to the little Taborite outpost established in the grove overhanging the bank of the Moldau. Gloria was walking amidst the foliage at a short distance from her pavilion; and she was somewhat surprised when she beheld the Taborite chieftain advancing along the pathway towards her. But she received him with an affectionate cordiality; and, dismounting from his horse, he embraced her with a tender familiarity, such as a father or a brother might display.

Then the radiant being took the arm of the mighty warrior; and, as they walked to and fro in the umbrageous path, they discoursed in a subdued tone and with earnest looks.

For upwards of half an hour did this conversation last; and, when it terminated, Zitzka mounted his horse and rode rapidly back to Prague—while Gloria issued immediate orders to break up the little encampment in the grove, alleging as a reason that apartments had been prepared for her in the castle.

By this time Angela had awakened from the deep slumber into which she had fallen when first introduced to the pavilion a few hours previously; and Gloria, dismissing her handmaidens for the moment, seated herself by the couch on which her guest was reclining. To the tender and even affectionate inquiries which she put, Angela responded to the effect that she still experi-

enced a great weakness, and a certain dizziness in the head which rendered it impossible for her to walk without support. Gloria thereupon gave her the kindest assurances of continued attention until she should be completely recovered; and she then proceeded to state that circumstances rendered necessary an immediate removal to the Castle of Prague.

Well, oh! well might Angela start in amazement; and well might the color come and go rapidly upon her cheeks, as these words met her ears. For it was in the castle that the three prisoners whom she hoped to rescue, were confined; it was thither she longed to penetrate; and, behold! accident or providence, she scarcely knew which, was about to consummate her desire and afford an invaluable succor by introducing her within those very walls.

Gloria observed the sudden agitation which seized upon her; but naturally supposing that it emanated from feelings of alarm at the thought of entering a gloomy fortalice whose name and aspect were alike associated with the darkest ideas of a prison-house, the radiant creature hastened to breathe reassuring words in Angela's ears. And Angela, perceiving how necessary—how vitally important, indeed, it was to conceal her emotions lest she should betray the object of her mission to Prague, and resolving for the sake of the White Lady of Altendorf Castle, to fulfil that mission or perish in the attempt, the heroic maiden, we say, succeeded in composing her looks, while she expressed her thanks to Gloria for all the kindness she was receiving from her.

But this being of transcendant loveliness stated to her how well the good Austrian Knight, Sir Ernest de Colmar, had spoken of her; and a thrill of pleasure passed through the heart of the gentle Angela when she heard that the warrior had given utterance to words in her praise.

Then Gloria by degrees led the conversation dexterously on in such a manner that the forest-maiden related to her the incident which had occurred at the inn on the border of the heath; and word for word as she had detailed to Sir Ernest the discourse which there took place between Father Cyprian and Dame Martha, did she repeat it now to the Daughter of Glory. This narrative accordingly filled up with great minuteness the outline of the story which the beauteous lady had already heard from the lips of Zitzka; but Angela, while relating the adventure, little suspected that the brilliant Gloria was none other than the Sister Marietta alluded to by the Carthusian and the old woman.—Nor did she observe how deep was the flush which appeared on Gloria's cheeks at the mention of the circumstance that Father Cyprian had proposed to introduce her, the forest maiden, to a noble lady, possessing a splendid mansion in the vicinity of Prague: nor again did she notice the actual writhing which passed through the entire form of the Daughter of Glory when that sentence spoken by the priest at the inn was repeated by Angela now, that sentence which apostrophised Dame Martha as *one of the sworn servitors to the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue!*

The result of the conversation which took place between Gloria and Angela on this evening of the first day of their acquaintance, produced an agreeable impression upon their minds with regard to each other: for the Daughter of Glory no longer felt jealous of a young woman whose manners were so simple, bashful, and retiring; and, on the other hand, the good-hearted Angela experienced the deepest gratitude towards the resplendent lady who treated her with such sisterly kindness and unaffected cordiality.

Shortly after dusk, Angela was assisted by Linda and Beatrice into a litter which had been prepared for her: while the Daughter of Glory, closely veiled, mounted a steed elegantly caparisoned. Her two hand-maidens were provided with graceful palfreys; and the escort consisted of the small Taborite detachment which had occupied the outpost where Gloria had hitherto fixed her quarters. In this manner the procession entered Prague, and repaired straight to the castle, where a suit of apartments had already been prepared for the reception of the females.

And thus did Angela become an inmate of the very fortalice which was the aim of her expedition and the scene where her heroism or her ingenuity was to be exercised!

Oh! the first night that she slept within those walls, how vividly came back to her memory every detail and every feature of that mysterious interview which she had with the White Lady in the subterraneans of the Castle of Altendorf; and every word which either that unhappy being or the old

steward Hubert had uttered on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion!

'The lives of the three nobles are to be saved,' had the White Lady emphatically said: 'and heaven must prompt you how to act!' But it appeared as if heaven had done more than merely prompt: it had clearly and plainly intervened to succor and assist. At least so thought the pious Angela; and a portion of her prayer this night was devoted to expressions of gratitude to that effect. And Hubert, too—what had *he* said? Oh! she had not forgotten one syllable that fell from his lips when he invoked heaven's blessing upon her head, and declared that a special vision had impressed him with the belief that she was destined to achieve marvellous things!

And did Angela think only of the White Lady and Hubert ere slumber visited her eyes on this first night that she slept within the walls of the Castle of Prague? No; for she thought also of her adopted parents, those kind-hearted peasants who had wept so bitterly and blessed her so fervently as she bade them farewell when setting out on her journey to the Bohemian capital. And she thought likewise of the transcendent Gloria, with the large dark eyes of such supernal lustre and the hair which seemed like floods of sunshine and gold mingling and rolling together in undulating masses, as if heaven's own blessed halo were lent to illume a countenance where the tint of the rose died off into the purity of the fairest and softest lily! Yes; Angela thought of this being of wondrous beauty: she thought, too, of those amiable, light-hearted, and lovely girls, Linda and Beatrice; and then she thought likewise—Oh! yes, she thought of the gallant and handsome Sir Ernest de Colmar!

For the reader will remember that Angela Wildon had formed her own ideal image and personification of all the attributes which should be possessed by the man to whom she could alone surrender her heart; and she at length found the idol of her imagination realized in the Austrian warrior! Was he not all that she had pictured to herself as worthy to be beloved? Was he not brave? and his years, too, were a few more than her own, promising great worldly experience on his part, and yet leaving him a young man!—Then his countenance, was it not as expressive of a generous frankness as it was characterized by a noble masculine beauty? And in even the short and only conversation that had ever passed between them—namely, that of the preceding night—had she not heard enough to convince her that his was an intellect of no common order?

It was in the midst of reflections of this nature that Angela fell asleep; but when she awoke in the morning she was laboring under the influence of a strong fever, the result of the accident of the preceding day, Gloria immediately summoned the most eminent physicians attached to the Taborite army; and the medical practitioner, while prescribing the usual remedies, ordered the patient to retain her couch until the fever should have subsided.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

Four days elapsed, and during this interval Sir Ernest de Colmar's two pages returned not to the Golden Falcon.

The knight's apprehensions were now of the most serious nature; and his suspense became the more torturing inasmuch as he was totally at a loss how to proceed, in order to ascertain what had become of the gallant youths. His position in this respect was rendered doubly painful by the necessity which compelled him to take his departure from Prague at so early a date; in fact his residence in the Bohemian capital was now limited to two days more, and in these two days must he either bestir himself in behalf of his pages, or else abandon them altogether to their fate, whatever it might be.

But what step was he to take? how was he to proceed?

These questions did he ask himself a thousand times during the four days which had elapsed since his interview with Gloria in the grove, and his subsequent visit to the Captain-General of the Taborites. But ingenuity suggested no feasible scheme in answer to those queries; and the fifth morning dawned without beholding either the return of the pages or the initiation of any measure towards the discovery of their fate.

It frequently happens that when a position of embarrassment, difficulty, or danger reaches a crisis at which the last

ray of hope is about to be absorbed in the black night of despair, a ray of inspiration flashes across the deepening darkness, and reveals some path to be pursued or some outlet of escape. The wretch, bewildered by the misfortunes that appear to be closing in around him, so as to exclude all hope of self-extrication,—and the unhappy being condemned to death for a crime of which he is innocent, and whose dungeon is so well guarded, and whose hour of doom is so near, that no possibility of flight can be imagined,—even such men as these have found an avenue of safety, the former from ruin and the latter from the gibbet, at the very moment when their positions assumed the most blank, hopeless, and desperate aspect.

And thus was it that when Sir Ernest de Colmar's soul was tortured beyond all endurance, with the suspense he experienced on account of Lionel and Konrad, and the harrowing excitement he suffered in consequence of the apparent impracticability of adopting any plan to discover their fate, either to succor or to avenge them—at this crisis of his feelings was it that a thought struck him with the vividness of an inspiration.

And that idea was fecund in conjectures and fertilising in surmises, all of which speedily took a collected shape in Sir Ernest de Colmar's imagination, as we will hasten to explain to our readers.

Going back to the conversation which he had with Master Templin on the first evening of his arrival at Prague, he reflected well upon the legend narrated in respect to the three brothers Schwartz. It was reported by some persons that those brethren had been recognized in the charge of men mounted on fleet steeds and wearing black masks; and the party of prisoners and custodians had been seen, as rumor declared, not only in the vicinity of Prague, but likewise in the immediate neighborhood of Altendorf Castle. Now Sir Ernest de Colmar himself had been in the custody of men mounted on fleet steeds and wearing black masks; and on that occasion he was hurried by them along the high road stretching towards the Austrian frontier, and consequently passing close by Altendorf Castle.

The next step which his chain of reasoning took was important. When the iron gratings fell in the subterranean of that unknown mansion where the Princess Elizabetha dwelt,—and when Sir Ernest was thus made a prisoner by Father Cyprian's treachery, this intriguing priest had fulminated against him the doom of the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss! It was clear, then, that whatever meaning might be attached to that doom, Father Cyprian was connected with some secret tribunal which pronounced and executed it. That he was the individual who had denounced Gloria in the church, Sir Ernest had long been convinced; and that there was such a tribunal as that of the Bronze Statue, was proved by the discourse which Angela had overheard between the Carthusian and Dame Martha.

And this Bronze Statue—was it not in Altendorf Castle? and had not the knight beheld it there—yes, and the hideous machinery which was no doubt connected in some way with that colossal image? And was it not therefore reasonable to suppose that the rumor was strictly correct which alleged that the brothers Schwartz were seen and recognised in the neighborhood of Altendorf Castle? Oh! wherefore should they have been in that dread vicinage, unless they were on their way to meet the doom of the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss? And now, as De Colmar reflected that he himself was being hurried along the road leading in the same direction, when he was saved from his masked guards by the sudden appearance of Count de Rosenberg's party—as he thought of all this, we say, he shuddered despite his natural dauntlessness; for the conviction was borne in unto his soul that *he* also was on that occasion on the way to Altendorf Castle to undergo the doom which the brothers Schwartz had doubtless suffered twelve years previously!

All these reflections, however, were but the mere preface to the conclusion to which his chain of reasoning brought the knight. For he argued within himself that inasmuch as the brothers Schwartz were working at Hamelen Castle when they disappeared so suddenly, it was probable that his own adventure with the Carthusian and the black masks had commenced in the same place. And if not there, perhaps in the White Mansion which the Baroness had built for the reception of widows, orphans, and friendless women? Yes; this supposition was borne out by many circumstances. The beautiful court-yard surrounded by white marble structures—the subterranean passages extending to such a

distance—then the archway and the draw-bridge by which he was conducted forth when mounted on horseback—these gradations seemed to describe a complete route in accordance with that pointed out by his suspicions. For what could be more plain than that he was at first introduced to the White Mansion, whence the subterraneans led to Hamelen Castle, this being the building from which the party had emerged on horseback?

But what circumstances were there confirmatory of this hypothesis? The reader will remember that *a strange suspicion flashed to De Colmar's mind* when Angela informed him how Father Cyprian had expatiated on the benevolence and charity of a certain noble lady with whom he was acquainted, and who possessed a splendid mansion in the vicinity of Prague—a lady to whose care the Carthusian had proposed to introduce Angela, with the assurance that she would be welcomed cordially and affectionately. Now was it not probable that the lady thus alluded to was the Baroness Hamelen? did not every circumstance seem to show that it was in the White Mansion the Princess Elizabetha had been placed by Father Cyprian? and was there not irrefragable evidence pointing to the conclusion that the baroness must be either an accomplice or a dupe of the intriguing priest, and that both her dwellings were either the head-quarters or the haunts of the agents of the tremendous tribunal of the Bronze Statue?

To these conclusions did Sir Ernest de Colmar come; and with them was necessarily associated the appalling fear that his two gallant young pages, in following up their researches with regard to the Princess Elizabetha, had fallen into the hands of the miscreants belonging to the tribunal just alluded to.

But what course was the knight to adopt? The conditions imposed by his dread conqueror on the heath, merely interdicted his interference touching the political affairs of Bohemia, and certainly could not apply to any search which he might institute relative to his missing attendants. As for any promise which he might have given Father Cyprian with regard to maintaining secret the princess's hiding-place, no violation of that pledge could possibly be involved in the circumstance of tracing the lost youths whithersoever his suspicions might lead him.

At the same time it was necessary to proceed with caution, circumspection, and secrecy. Sir Ernest could not invoke Zitzka's aid to obtain the assistance of a few Taborite soldiers, because the mere fact of visiting the White Mansion with such an escort would probably lead to the betrayal of the Princess Elizabetha's abode to the Reformers; whereas the policy of Austria and the chivalrous disposition of De Colmar were alike repugnant to the idea of her royal highness falling into the hands of Zitzka. Besides, the invocation of Taborite aid on the part of Sir Ernest would have a direct political significancy, and therefore be in contravention of the terms stipulated by his sable conqueror.

Having thus well weighed the position in which he was placed, the Austrian warrior came to the conclusion that he must embark alone and unaided in the dangerous enterprise which lay before him. Single-handed and with all imaginable secrecy and precaution must he venture into the haunt of the myrmidons of Father Cyprian and the masked officials of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue. But the knight shrank not from the undertaking: he who had braced on the steel panoply to wage battle against the Enemy of Mankind, was not likely to be daunted by such an adventure as this.

Again, however, did he ask himself how he was to proceed? Should he repair to the White Mansion, demand an interview with the Baroness Hamelen, force himself into her presence, if refused an audience, and then trust to circumstances to develop results in his favor? This scheme was scarcely a prudent or cautious one; and yet he knew none other that was practicable.

And here we may as well mention a little incident, the occurrence of which was too trifling to induce us to stop the previous thread of our narrative in order to record it in its proper place. For the incident merely was that three or four days after the knight's arrival at Prague he had despatched a note to the Baroness Hamelen requesting to be allowed to pay his homage to her; and although the letter was couched in the most courteous terms, and stated that the writer was Austria's representative at the council then about to be holden, it remained altogether unanswered. Not so much as a verbal reply was vouchsafed; and Templin, to whom the delivery of the note had been entrusted, and who had himself become the bearer

of it to the White Mansion, was at the time much vexed and annoyed that a lady of whom he had hitherto spoken so highly, should treat his distinguished guest with such indignity.

This little incident had not failed to enter as a link into the chain of reasoning that had brought Sir Ernest de Colmar to the conclusion above narrated; for it was clear enough that the baroness would not willingly receive the knight as a visitor at that mansion which he could not fail to recognise as the one whither he had already been introduced by Father Cyprian; and as her ladyship was unable to discover any legitimate reason for declining the interview so courteously solicited, she had been compelled to adopt the ruder alternative of leaving the billet unnoticed altogether.

At least, thus thought Sir Ernest de Colmar; and, while referring to the incident just related, he asked himself how he could possibly expect that the Baroness Hamelen would now grant him the audience which he had so vainly demanded on the former occasion. It was by no means likely; and as to forcing his way into her presence, such a measure might be more easily meditated than executed. The bravos whom she most likely had at her command, would perhaps overpower him; and thus his rashness would only seal his own fate without serving his lost pages.

Such was the cruel dilemma in which Sir Ernest de Colmar found himself placed; and the fifth day was gliding past, hour by hour, without any plan being resolved upon. Though determined to act, he knew not how to begin: the campaign was fixed upon, but the difficulty was to open it.

Sunset was drawing nigh, and the warrior was issuing forth from the Golden Falcon, with the desperate resolution of repairing straightway to the White Mansion, and trusting the remainder of the adventure to chance, when he was stopped by the worthy landlord, who was lounging on the threshold of his establishment.

'Pardon me, your excellency, for my presumption,' said Master Templin; 'but methought you would like to know who that majestic-looking lady is, now turning into yon street leading towards the bridge.'

'And who may she be?' inquired De Colmar, all his veins tingling with the presentiment that suddenly sprang up in his mind.

'The Baroness Hemelen,' responded Templin.

'Thank heaven!' ejaculated De Colmar; and rushing away from the landlord, who was startled by the suddenness and surprised by the fervor of the ejaculation, the knight hurried in the same direction as that taken by the Baroness.

But in a few minutes he relaxed his speed: for he observed her traversing the bridge over the Moldau, two well-clad female dependents following at a respectful distance.

The baroness was elegantly attired; and a veil flowed loosely over her shoulders, without concealing her countenance. Her fine figure, queen-like gait, and imposing though graceful demeanor, instantly struck the observation of the knight; and when he succeeded in overtaking her, just as she emerged from the bridge into the adjoining street, he perceived at a glance that her countenance was of a noble beauty, admirably corresponding with the fine symmetry of her form.

'Is it possible that such a woman can be associated with the murderous miscreants of a secret tribunal?' was the question which now instantaneously suggested itself to the mind of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

But he had not a moment's leisure to resolve what its answer should be, for the Baroness Hamelen, who on her side had been struck by the handsome features and noble bearing of the knight, the very instant that her eyes caught sight of him, suddenly let her veil detach itself from her person, whether accidentally or purposely we must leave the reader to conjecture.

To spring after the richly-worked lace, as a gentle zephyr bore it along to a short distance, was naturally the instantaneous impulse of Sir Ernest de Colmar; and, having speedily recovered the volatile fugitive, he hastened to present it to her ladyship.

With an unmistakeable expression of mingled pleasure and tenderness in the look which she threw upon the knight, and with a blush at the same time mantling her cheeks, the baroness received the veil and threw it gracefully over her head; then, instantly raising it from before her countenance, she said, 'May I inquire to whom I am indebted for this act of courtesy and chivalrous attention?'

'I am called Sir Louis de Hazburgh,' promptly responded the knight, secret-

ly pleased to find by the question put to him that he was personally a stranger to the Baroness; then, affecting to be ignorant who she was, he said, 'And may I on my side beg to solicit the name of the lady who has honored me with her thanks, for a service immeasurably beneath so gracious a tribute?'

'Then your excellency is a stranger—a perfect stranger in Prague?' exclaimed the Baroness, evading an immediate reply to his query, and casting on him a glance which was meant to pierce into his very soul.

'I am a perfect stranger in Prague,' returned De Colmar, emphatically, although it cost him an effort thus to deal in even so slight and venial a falsehood. 'Indeed, I only arrived in your fair capital this morning—and——'

'When do you propose to leave it, Sir Knight?' demanded the Baroness hastily, and again with a scrutinizing look, to assure herself that his representations were truly made.

'I must continue my journey to-morrow, or at latest, on the day following,' said De Colmar; for he now plainly perceived that his chance of procuring an invitation to the dwelling of the Baroness, depended upon the answers he gave to her questions, and of what nature these answers should be, the questions themselves suggested beyond all possibility of mistake. 'But all this while,' he exclaimed, 'I am keeping you standing, fair lady, in the midst of a public thoroughfare, whereas I ought to offer my escort to conduct you as far as your own abode.'

'I dwell at some distance from Prague, Sir Knight,' observed the lady, now replacing the veil over her countenance and slowly resuming her walk, with De Colmar by her side.

'However great the distance, it would charm me to accompany you thither,' was the answer, as promptly as it was courteously given.

The Baroness Hamelen made no immediate response: but quickening her pace, she proceeded towards the southern gate of the city, on gaining which, she suddenly stopped short, exclaiming, 'If you pass beyond the fortifications, Sir Knight, you will not perhaps be enabled to re-enter until the morning; as I believe that the Taborite sentinels receive strict orders respecting the egress and ingress of strangers between sunset and sunrise.'

'Then how am I to act, fair lady?' asked De Colmar, pretending to be deeply perplexed. 'On the one hand, courtesy and inclination alike prompt me to offer my escort so far as you will permit me to accompany you: and on the other hand, I should be at a loss where to procure a night's lodging, all stranger as I am in these parts, if shut out from access to the inn at which I have taken up my quarters.'

'If your inclination do really accompany your gallant notions of courtesy, Sir Louis de Hazburgh,' said the lady, 'you may rest assured that on reaching the door of my dwelling, such hospitality as I am enabled to afford will be most cordially offered. But I warn you,' she continued, her eyes flashing through her veil as she once more fixed a penetrating glance upon the knight's countenance—a look the searching scrutiny of which he affected not to observe, 'I warn you that my mansion is one of luxury, pleasure, and delight, and that it is only accessible to those who are prepared to plunge headlong into all the enjoyments which may be supposed to exist where the God of Wine, and the Goddesses of Love, Music, and Dancing hold their brilliant court.'

'Ah! too happy should I be, gracious lady, to be honored with an introduction to that realm of bliss!' exclaimed De Colmar, assuming a tone of tender and and melting entreaty.

'Then shall I hesitate no longer to initiate your Excellency into the delights and fascinations of my mansion,' observed the lady: 'for I feel convinced that you will not be startled by certain little precautions which I may take—even should the mysteriousness thereof extend to a demand that you suffer yourself to be blindfolded while repairing on horseback to a scene of ecstatic bliss that will amply repay you for the annoyance of the preliminary ordeal.'

'Command me in all things, lady,' exclaimed De Colmar; I am your slave—and moreover the romance of this adventure suits well with my disposition.'

'You have spoken in a tone of frankness that pleases me,' said the lady. 'Already do we understand each other as if we were acquaintances of long standing: and the feeling of confidence wherewith you have inspired me, will render your excellency doubly welcome to my abode. Come, Sir Louis de Hazburgh, we require no farther parley upon the subject.

Thus speaking, the lady took the knight's arm, which she pressed gently

with her elegantly gloved hand; and Sir Ernest de Colmar acknowledged this tender familiarity with a smile of assumed gratification—a piece of duplicity to which he forced himself for the sake of the faithful youths on whose behalf he was undertaking the present adventure.

For the stipulations at which the lady had more than even vaguely alluded, and which required that he should be blindfolded, dissipated any doubt which might still have existed in his mind as to the fact that it was to the White Mansion he had been taken by Father Cyprian on the occasion which our readers will not fail to remember.

And now, behold the Baroness Hamelen conducting him, as she leant upon his arm, to the grove enshrouding the picturesque cemetery already so often mentioned in this narrative, Horses were there in readiness; and the same middle-aged man, whom De Colmar had seen before, was in attendance.

An arrow of ice appeared to penetrate into the heart of Sir Ernest, as he caught the first glimpse of that individual's countenance; for it instantly struck him that he should be recognised by one who probably knew him, or who at all events might address him in a manner showing that they had met before. But his fears that the adventure would thus abruptly terminate in failure, speedily proved to be groundless; for the man spoke not a word, nor even made the slightest sign of recognition, as he handed the ecclesiastical gown to Sir Ernest de Colmar.

The lady whispered in the knight's ear a hasty entreaty that he would assume the disguise; and our hero unhesitatingly obeyed. The cowl was then buttoned over his face, and the discreet groom, who fulfilled to admiration the automaton part of a menial, without venturing to comment either by word or look on what was passing, assisted Sir Ernest de Colmar to mount one of the horses.

The baroness and her two female dependants were similarly accommodated, though not similarly disguised and hooded; and the party set off at a smart gallop, the lady holding the guiding-rein of the Austrian warrior's steed.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ANGELA.

We must now leave Sir Ernest de Colmar for the present, while we return to Angela Wildon: for it was on the same evening of the Knight's adventure with the Baroness Hamelen, that the forest-maiden, being perfectly recovered from the effects of the accident which had so nearly proved fatal to her, took leave of the Daughter of Glory and the two kind-hearted girls at whose hands she had received the utmost attention.

To Linda and Beatrice her farewells were first said; and when she proceeded to Gloria's chamber for the same purpose, that radiant, romantic, and mysterious being bade her be seated, for a few minutes, observing, 'I would speak to thee seriously on thine own account, Angela: for to-morrow I depart from Prague, and it would grieve me to know that thou wast left friendless and unprotected in this great city.'

'Generous lady,' replied Angela, 'I am indebted to you more than language can express, not only for the attentions I have received and the hospitality I have experienced within these walls, but likewise for the sweet sympathy which you now manifest towards me.'

'Then tell me, my dear friend, for so must I alike denominate and consider you,' said Gloria, her rich metallic voice sounding surpassingly musical to the ears of the forest-maiden; 'tell me in what manner I can serve thee.'

'There is no farther kindness that I may crave at your hands, dear lady,' replied Angela, her own liquid tones being fraught with ineffable sweetness.

'But whither go you, Angela?' inquired the Daughter of Glory. 'Think not that I am thus questioning you from motives of curiosity: I am alike incapable of such meanness, and have no possible interest to serve by prying into your affairs. My whole and sole object is to assure myself that you go not hence to encounter any peril, distress, or difficulty which it may be in my power to alleviate or remove. Tell me, then, in a word, how I may be useful to you!'

'Once more, dear lady,' said Angela, 'permit me to state that I have nothing to crave at your hands, but that my gratitude is increased by your kindness.'

'I do not seek your confidence, Angela,' rejoined the Daughter of Glory,

'unless you be perfectly willing to accord it. At the same time I beseech you, as a friend, not to suffer any sentiment of foolish pride, or bashfulness, or reserve, to prevent you from invoking my aid if there be any way ir which I can serve you. Do you need gold, Angela? if so, my purse is at your disposal, and it is by no means indifferently filled. Do you require good counsel or advice? though younger than yourself in years, I am nevertheless older in experience.'

'Gracious lady, it appears almost rude and uncourteous on my part to say nay to every generous proposal which comes from your lips,' said Angela, her voice and manner alike proving how deeply she was affected by Gloria's demonstration of friendship: 'but believe me when I assure you that I am well provided with gold, and that in the objects which have brought me to Prague I am guided by competent advice and full instructions.'

'Then will I press my services upon you no longer,' said Gloria, taking the forest-maiden's hand and clasping it with kindly warmth 'Nevertheless, there is one piece of advice which circumstances induce me to give you, my dear friend,' she continued, her tone and manner becoming suddenly both grave and serious. 'Father Cyprian whom you have met, and who was heretofore known to me by another name. But of that no matter——'

'You are ill, dear lady!' exclaimed Angela, perceiving how suddenly the color came and went on Gloria's cheeks, and how the radiant being's hand trembled in her own.

'No—no—it is nothing—nothing,' said Gloria, recovering her presence of mind by a sudden and vigorous effort. 'But I would counsel you, my dear Angela,' she continued, with a singular and earnest emphasis, 'to avoid that man as you would a pestilence: and should an imperious necessity or uncontrollable circumstances again throw you together, I charge you not to trust yourself to his guidance in any matter—but on the contrary, to follow the course which shall be precisely opposite to the one he may recommend. And above all, accept not the hospitality of any friend of whom he may speak.'

'I thank you, dear lady,' said Angela, 'most sincerely thank you for this advice, which I shall assuredly follow to the very letter. I was already prepared to mistrust that man—for many reasons, but for none more than because he appears to be connected with some tribunal as terrible as it is mysterious, the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue!'

'Ah! what know you of that awful institution?' demanded Gloria, suddenly becoming pale as death, while the lustre of her magnificent eyes grew restlessly glittering and uneasily feverish, so that their glances were painful to meet.

'I know nothing of the institution,' responded Angela, fearful that she had already said too much, and remembering her promise of secrecy to the White Lady respecting everything she saw in the subterraneans of Altendorf Castle. 'But there appears to be an awe-inspiring presentiment attached to the mere name of that tribunal——'

'Yes: truly!' observed Gloria: then for a few minutes the lovely creature remained wrapped in a profound and evidently painful reverie. 'Angela,' she at length said, awaking from her meditations and recovering all her wonted composure, 'you will not neglect the counsel I have given you, for better were it to become enfolded in the coils of a serpent, than to place yourself in the power of that man whom *you* know as Father Cyprian. And now, dear friend, since you are determined to depart, I will say farewell.'

Thus speaking, the beauteous Gloria embraced the forest-maiden, who immediately afterwards quitted the Castle.

She proceeded straightway to the Golden Falcon, where she inquired for Sir Earnest de Colmar, to whom she was anxious to proffer her renewed thanks for that deliverance from a watery grave which she owed to him. But she learned from Templin that the Knight had been absent an hour or two; and the worthy landlord likewise observed that he knew it was his Excellency's intention to take his departure early the next morning, on his return to Austria.

This announcement carried a sudden gloom to the heart of Angela, she scarcely knew why: and for nearly a minute did she remain silent, in an attitude of profound thought.

At length, starting from her reverie, she exclaimed, 'I hope to have the pleasure of seeing his Excellency for a few moments in the morning previous to his departure. But if anything should occur to prevent the accomplishment of this desire—which is also a duty on my part—do you, Messer Templin, assure his Excellency that the prayers of

Angela Wildon will ever follow him, as the saviour of her life.'

Having thus spoken—and without waiting to see if the landlord had anything farther to say, or to inform him whither she was going and when she should return—the forest-maiden sped rapidly away.

It was now nine o'clock in the evening; but the beautiful August sky was clear and star-lit, and the moon was rising in her silent majesty.

Towards the bridge did Angela Wildon hasten; and, descending the steps leading to the pier at which several boats were moored, she accosted an old man who was left in charge of the little vessels. At first he bluntly refused her demand to hire a boat for a few hours; and he even looked upon her with a degree of suspicion that began to alarm her. But when she produced a couple of pieces of gold, the talismanic influence of the glittering metal instantly became visible in the softening of the lines on his weather-beaten countenance; and, as he thrust the coin into a greasy pouch which hung to his belt, he muttered something to the effect that 'people must not be particular in those hard times how they earned a trifle for their subsistence.'

Loosening the smallest, lightest, and most manageable of his vessels, he handed the forest-maiden into the boat, and gave her instructions how to use the oars. For this kindness she thanked him, and then requested he would lend her a lamp, with the means of procuring a light should she have occasion to use it. To this demand the old man hastened so accede; for he fancied that he saw in the adventure some love intrigue which required mystery and circumspection. Thus, in the course of a few minutes, Angela was accommodated with all she needed for the daring enterprise which she had in view; and, pushing the boat away from the pier she allowed it to float along with the stream.

In the course of a quarter of an hour the maiden arrived opposite the frowning towers and massive walls of the Castle of Prague; and, urging the little bark close in against the side of the fortress, she speedily reached the arched entrance to a narrow canal branching off from the river and running beneath the immense accumulation of edifices piled above.

From the beauteous moonlight that now played upon the bosom of the river, that caverned passage with its silent stream led off into utter darkness.

And never did boatmen or pleasure-party, when proceeding down the Moldau, pass that gloomy arch-way without a perceptible shudder and a low whispering amongst themselves; for in the time of the Bohemian kings, rumor was wont to tell how political offenders and personages who became obnoxious to those monarchs, were secretly murdered in the dungeons of the castle, and how their corpses were as secretly borne forth at night in a boat, by means of that dark canal, and buried in the deep, silent river!

Nor less did rumor declare that strange sights were often seen and unearthly noises heard on that part of the Moldau which washed the precipitate castle-walls, and likewise under the caverned arch that spanned the little stream running beneath the mighty fortalice.

But, nothing daunted by these reports to which she was no stranger, Angela Wildon heroically guided her boat into that canal of ominous reputation; and, lighting her lamp, which she placed at the head of the little vessel, she commended herself to the care of heaven as the current bore her rapidly onward beneath the vaulted roof.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE HEROINE.

A SUPERNAL courage and a heroic spirit of enterprise animated the beauteous maiden as she thus committed the frail bark that bore her to the deep and silent stream, which flowed in the caverned passage.

Standing up in the boat, she guided it with the oar in such a manner that she kept it clear of the rugged walls; but when she had thus been wafted about fifty yards, the current flowed round a huge projecting buttress with such force that the light vessel was whirled about in a way which threatened to swamp it. The oar was, however, used by Angela with such skill and promptitude, that she succeeded in saving her boat from wreck and herself from a watery grave; and stern-foremost the bark now floated on, until it ran with some degree of violence against a large boat moored at the bottom of a flight of stone steps.

These stairs, rising abruptly from the water, closed the caverned passage, and ascending up an opening, the summit of which was involved in total darkness; and that large boat which was moored in this spot, was doubtless the one wherein the victims of royal tyranny, in the time of the Bohemian kings, were borne forth to be swathed in the winding-sheet of the Moldau.

Having made her own boat fast to an iron ring which was attached to the wall, Angela took the lamp in one hand, and, shading it carefully with the other, she began to mount the steps. The height, as already intimated, was considerable, and the stairs gradually grew narrower towards the top. At length Angela reached a grating which was fastened by a bolt inside: but by thrusting her arm through the bars, she was enabled, after repeated efforts, to draw it back. For it was rusted in its setting, as if it had not been disturbed for some time.

The grating, too, creaked upon its hinges as the intrepid young woman pushed it open, and, passing on, she entered a long, low, and narrow passage. The silence of the tomb prevailed therein—a silence which her aerial tread did not break; and the lamp appeared to burn so feebly that it rather served to show the stupendous darkness which lay before and behind in all its intense blackness, than to illumine the place. At the end of this corridor there was another grating, which Angela opened in the same manner and with equal difficulty as the former; and then, as she proceeded slowly and cautiously once more, she held the lamp high up so as to obtain the utmost benefit from its light.

But now she started wildly; an involuntary ejaculation of terror burst from her lips, and her features became bloodless as those of a corpse; for it appeared as if she had suddenly entered a place filled with armed men. Nevertheless, a profound stillness, interrupted only for an instant by that cry of fear, reigned around her; and it struck the maiden that she was either in an armory or a place of statues. But scarcely had this idea sprung up in her mind, when it yielded to new terrors; for the objects which she beheld seemed suddenly to move, though none quitted its station.

Wildly did Angela cast her eyes around; here a plume appeared to wave; there a helmetted head to bow; here an arm to beckon menacingly, and there a spear to shake towards her. Then all was still again—all motionless, and a feeling of relief came upon the maiden; but scarcely had she experienced the change when every object seemed to move again, plumes to wave, steel-bound heads to bow, arms to beckon, and spears to shake!

The blood turned to ice in Angela's veins—ice too fell upon her heart, and a second cry of terror had just risen to her lips, when, like an inspiration, did the thought flash to her brain that the appearance of motion was given to the armed objects by the swaying and tossing of the flame of the lamp as quick gusts of wind swept through the room. The truth of this suspicion was speedily tested by holding the lamp in another position; and Angela, now smiling at her terrors, proceeded to inspect the place the features of which had for upwards of a minute produced so startling an effect upon her.

It was, as she had already for an instant, suspected, an armory; and suits of panoply were disposed around in upright positions and warrior-like attitudes—the delusion that they were living men thus appareled cap-a-pie being heightened by the circumstance that all the visors were closed. There were tall and massive suits of black iron armor, studded with sable nails, and the plumage of the helmets being of the same funereal dye: there also were bright steel fabrics, with red, blue, or green feathers drooping over the polished burgonets: and Angela likewise beheld two or three suits of clumsy mail contrasting singularly with other panoplies of chain or link material, such as worn by the crusaders.

A few minutes' rapid survey of these objects were sufficient to render her fully acquainted with their nature; and she was about to continue her way into a passage opening from this armory, when her attention was arrested by a small and comparatively delicate suit of steel armor standing upon a pedestal in was one corner.

And a charming panoply it was, brilliant as if it had only just emanated from the forge of the armorer—bright and graceful in appearance, and well suited either for a gentle page or an Amazonian warrior. The plumage above the helmet was of a bright crimson; and to the belt was suspended a long thin sword, the blade of which must have been elastic and of admirable temper if

it were indeed to match the exquisite panoply.

At first the forest-maiden stood gazing upon this suit of armor with no other feeling than of curiosity: but insensibly there stole into her mind an idea which brought a smile to her lips, and then a flush of heroism to her cheeks. And as this thought obtained greater consistency in her brain, she was led to reflect that in her female garb she incurred many risks and perils which would not menace a person of the opposite sex; and, in order therefore, to ward off those dangers and those probabilities of insult, it seemed only necessary to assume the apparel of a man.

But if she were to usurp the garments of the other sex, why not assume the defences also? why not, in a word, array herself in that very panoply and take those very weapons which she beheld before her? Besides, in the perilous undertaking which she had in hand, she knew that she should presently encounter a sentinel; and though she was already in the possession of the watch-word to enable her to pass him unmolested, yet it would be far more calculated to lull all suspicions on his part asleep, were she to declare herself an emissary from Zitzka rather than as a female friend having received permission to visit the three State Prisoners. For it was this latter representation which she had hitherto thought of making: but now the presence of that fine suit of armor suggested the former scheme as the better and the more feasible. In a word, while appearing in the garb of her sex as she now was, she could only represent herself as a relative or friend of the noble prisoners: but if she disguised herself as an armed page, the excuse she could then make would be far more colorable.

Time was precious, and Angela had not long to deliberate. Nor did she require much self consultation when once the idea was fully developed in her mind, and in the presence of the weighty motives which we have just explained, But now arose the question with the forest-maiden whether she could put on that armor without assistance? A few moments' careful examination of the various plates and pieces composing it, as they were now fitted together, relieved her of any doubt upon that head; and, placing the lamp in a convenient position, the intrepid young woman commenced her task.

Having laid aside her upper garments, she proceeded to invest her lovely form with the bright steel armor, the whole of which was lined with soft wash-leather; and as she overcame each new difficulty and succeeded in fastening each successive piece, her enthusiasm became more exalted. At length this heroic toilet, so thoroughly new to her, was completed by the placing of the helmet on her head and the gauntlets upon her hands; and as she girt on the sword to her waist, she felt that the weapon would not prove a mere ornamental appendage if danger demanded that she should use it. The light oval shield she slung over her back; the spear she thought it better not to take, as it would only prove an encumbrance in her present enterprise within the walls of the Castle of Prague; but with the sword on one side, a dagger on the other, and the good steel armor at all points, she felt as if by putting off her female apparel she had laid aside all her natural feminine timidity at the same time.

Yes—that timidity might have been cast away from her; but her woman's graces and her woman's tender sensibilities still remained. For nothing could exceed the elegance of the forest-maiden's appearance as she now traversed the armory with the lamp in her hand; and the bosom that was imprisoned in the steel corselet, sighed gently as she thought how happy she could be if allowed to follow in that guise the fortunes of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

Keeping her vizor up, Angela now proceeded on her way—her feet no longer treading noiselessly upon the stone-paved floor, but raising the echoes of the passage into which she entered.

In a few minutes she reached a third iron grating, which opened into a yard; and having ascertained this fact, she retraced her steps to the armory, where she deposited the lamp in a secure place to protect it from the gusts which swept through the lofty apartment. Then, groping her way along the passage once more, she opened the grating and passed into the yard, which was a very small enclosure, surrounded by high frowning towers.

To that yard the regular and usual mode of entrance was by means of a narrow alley running between two of the towers and forming an outlet into the great court of the Castle: so that the sentinel whom Angela knew she was now about to encounter, would be certain to suppose that she had come

thither by means of the avenue of approach just mentioned, instead of secretly and stealthily by the private communication with the river.

The moonlight shone down into that yard and was reflected in the bright armor of the forest-maiden as she traversed it with hasty steps: but she paused for a single moment to glance up at a row of four windows high up in one of the towers. Lights shone from those casements: and Angela said to herself, with a sigh, 'The generous Gloria and her two kind-hearted handmaidens little suspect how treacherous is the use that I am now making of the hospitality I experienced at her hands!'

At the foot of the tower facing that one in which Gloria's apartments were situated, there was a low door set so deep in the wall that the recess showed the immense thickness of the solid masonry. Angela tapped with her gauntlet at a little sliding pannel which there was in the upper part of the huge door, and which was immediately drawn aside by some one within. A dim light then appeared; and the maiden obtained an indistinct view of a countenance surmounted by a steel-cap.

'Open, worthy sentinel!' exclaimed Angela, rendering her voice as masculine as possible.

'To whom am I to open?' demanded the Taborite soldier thus addressed, and who, it appeared, was on guard inside the tower.

'To one who can give thee the password, friend,' was the maiden's prompt reply.

'And that pass-word?' said the man, interrogatively.

'*Zitzka, the Firebrand of Faith*,' rejoined Angela, in the same bold and decided tone.

The Taborite uttered not another syllable, but hastened to draw back the heavy bolts and unloose the massive chain, the end of which fell with a clanking sound upon the stone-pavement within: the door was then opened—and Angela entered a low, arched hall, lighted by an iron lamp suspended to the centre of the groined ceiling.

'What are your commands, young page?' inquired the sentinel, completely deceived as to Angela's sex: 'from whom do you come? and whither do you wish to go?'

'I come from the Captain-General,' responded the maiden, boldly and unhesitatingly; 'and I have a message which I must deliver privately to each of the three State prisoners.'

'Ascend those stairs, you pretty page,' said the man, pointing to a flight of steps leading from the farther extremity of the hall, 'and this key will open the door at the summit. You will then enter a passage, and be pleased to take note that the three first doors on the right-hand side are those of the apartments in which the State prisoners are confined. I need scarcely counsel thee to secure each door again on taking your leave of their lordships; for if they were all three to escape at the same moment, it might prove difficult for you and me to detain them.'

'Fear not that I shall neglect your advice, good Taborite,' exclaimed Angela, as she received the key which the sentinel handed to her.

Secretly exulting at the success which had thus far attended upon her enterprise, the heroic young woman ascended the stairs, which were lighted by an iron censer-lamp placed in a niche; and having opened the door at the head of the steps, she reached a long, high, but narrow corridor. On each side of this passage there were six doors, every one fastening with a massive bolt; and thus nothing could be more gloomy than the aspect of the place in which the maiden now found herself. For the idea naturally struck her that if she were to fail in the undertaking which she had in hand, she herself would inevitably be thrown into one of those dungeon-cells, the massive doors of which frowned upon her on either side. Unless, indeed, there were some sovereign virtue or talismanic influence in the ring which the White Lady had given her and which she wore in the little velvet bag suspened beneath her raiment to her neck—that ring which, in case of extremity—and only in such a case—she was to present to the Captain General of the Taborites!

But while we are thus speculating upon the risks which she incurs and the probable means of salvation which she possesses, the heroic maiden has drawn back the bolt of the first door on the right hand side of the passage; and in a vaulted chamber fitted up with a tolerably generous view to the comfort of the inmate, she finds herself in the presence of an individual of tall form, handsome countenance, and noble mien, and whose years were still in their prime.

Rising from his seat, the prisoner surveyed our heroine with mingled curi-

osity and suspense: for the appearance of one whom he naturally took to be a page belonging to some chieftain of rank, and the circumstance of the visit being paid at such a late hour, were well calculated to excite those feelings on the part of the noble captain. But the frank, open, and ingenuous countenance of Angela—a countenance too lovely to be otherwise than replete with innocence and candor — inspired the State prisoner with a rapid conviction that a messenger of such agreeable exterior never could have been chosen to convey evil intelligence.

'Who art thou, fair youth?' he demanded, perceiving that his visitor labored under some embarrassment or reserve how to explain the object of her presence.

'I am a friend,' responded Angela, in a low tone, but speaking in a voice which she endeavored to render as masculine as possible. 'But tell me to whom I have the honor of addressing myself?'

'The Marquis of Schomberg, fair youth,' answered the nobleman. 'And now may I ask in return who it is that appears to take so kind an interest in my cause, and how you have obtained access to me?'

'Who I am, it matters not, my lord,' replied Angela hastily: 'but I am come to save you from captivity——'

'Ah! this may be a friendly visit,' interrupted the marquis: 'and it may be some deeply contrived piece of treachery. If the former, fair youth, thou wilt pardon my suspicions, on the score that thou refusest thy name.'

'Well — call me Angelo — Angelo Wildon,' exclaimed our heroine, converting her beautiful feminine Christian name into a masculine appellation.— 'And now listen to me, my lord, without farther interruption. There is but one Taborite soldier between you and liberty—one man only whom it is necessary to overpower and bind, but not otherwise maltreat,' she added emphatically: 'and now will you consent to follow me away from this place?'

'Most assuredly, good youth,' answered the nobleman, his countenance lighting up with joy—for it was impossible any longer to entertain a suspicion of the sincerity of his mysterious deliverer. 'Pardon me if for a moment—'

'We have no time, my lord, to exchange mere words of courtesy,' said Angela, firmly but respectfully. 'It is now necessary that I should prepare your noble companions for that freedom which I have vowed to procure for all three.'

Thus speaking, the maiden quitted the chamber and entered the one adjoining, which was occupied by the Baron of Altendorf. To him she was an utter stranger—she, the humble forest-maiden, who had dared so much to liberate him!—but he was known by sight to her—for she had not lived so long in the vicinity of Altendorf Castle without having frequently seen the proud lord of the feudal fortalice.

The object of her visit was explained to the Baron in the same terms and with as much conciseness as to the Marquis of Schomberg; and when those two noblemen had been hastily brought together by Angela, she proceeded to the third cell, in which she found the Count of Rosenberg.

'My lord,' she said, advancing towards him at once and without the slightest hesitation—for her acquaintance with his kind disposition and affable manners banished all reserve and embarrassment in this instance—'my lord, I am here to save you from captivity—you and the other nobles imprisoned for the same cause——'

'Who are you, generous youth?' exclaimed the Count; and as the rays of the lamp which lighted the chamber, fell on the countenance of our heroine, his lordship contemplated those features with an earnestness evincing that they were far from unfamiliar to his memory. 'Surely I have seen you before? And yet at the moment I cannot recollect—'

'I am not aware that your lordship has ever seen me until now,' observed the young maiden, with difficulty nerving herself in such a manner as to subdue the confusion that threatened to cover her cheeks with blushes: 'but my sister has spoken to me of your lordship's goodness towards her adopted parents——'

'What! is it possible that Angela Wildon is your sister, fair youth?' cried the Lord of Rosenberg, now recalling to mind the features of the forest maiden. 'I was not aware that she had any known relatives in the world.'

'Yes, my lord, I am her brother,' said our heroine, determined to maintain a masculine character in order to suit her warrior garb. 'My name is Angelo, and I am devoted to your service. Indeed, I swore to deliver you from captivity, or perish in the attempt.'

'Excellent youth, worthy of so charming a sister!' cried the good Count de

Rosenberg, taking the maiden's gauntletted hand. 'My eternal gratitude shall be your due; not so much on account of the advantage which I may derive from this chivalrous act itself, but on account of the noble feelings which have dictated your conduct.'

'Oh! my lord, you have already sufficiently rewarded me; or rather, you have established so many claims upon my gratitude,' exclaimed Angela, 'by your unvaried kindness towards the good Wildon and his wife, that I am prepared to die if my death would serve you. But we must not linger here a moment longer than is absolutely necessary; every instant is precious!'

Scarcely had she finished speaking when the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baron of Altendorf entered the cell; and the three nobleman congratulated each other upon the prospect of escape that had suddenly opened to their view, for although they were as yet totally unacquainted with Angela's intentions or arrangements, still there was such an air of confidence in the manner and proceedings of their youthful friend that they caught the inspiration of that courage and hopefulness which were thus so signally displayed on her part.

The chances and mode of their flight were now communicated to them in a few hasty words; and no objection was offered to the plan which Angela had thus chalked out. The three powerful nobles were thus satisfied to entrust themselves to the direction and care of one whom they took to be a gallant young man, but who was in reality only a woman, though with a chivalrous heart and a ready arm!

The heroine's arrangements having been imparted, as just observed, to the prisoners, no time was now lost in carrying them into execution. The three nobles remained at the head of the staircase, the door of which Angela pretended to fasten, although she only raised a din by closing it violently and turning the key in the lock, leaving it ajar after all. She then descended the flight of stone steps, traversed the hall, and accosted the sentinel, saying, 'Here is the key, for which I thank you.'

'Your visit was not a long one, my pretty page,' observed the Taborite soldier; and while thus speaking, he deposited his halberd upon a bench in order to secure the ponderous key to a ring attached to his belt.

Then, with the velocity and unerring dexterity of a tigress—but without the same malignant feeling and fatal intent—did Angela spring upon the unsuspecting soldier. The suddenness of the attack and the skill with which it was made, overpowered him in an instant: and thus was the stalwart sentinel hurled upon his back by one whose strength, if met at the moment by only common resistance, would have been utterly inadequate to the achievement of such a feat.

Scarcely was he thus overthrown, when Angela's knee was upon his breast and her dagger gleaming within a few inches of his face; while in the same instant, she said in a rapid, low, but resolute voice, 'Silence, if you value your life!'

The noise of the armed man's heavy fall upon the paved floor had reached the ears of the three nobles, who were waiting at the head of the staircase in anxious expectation of this incident; and now that their young deliverer's plan of proceeding had been thus far successfully crowned by so daring an exploit, they rushed to her assistance.

The sentinel, perceiving that he was the victim of some admirably devised stratagem, and naturally supposing that instantaneous death would be the result of any attempt to raise an alarm, yielded to necessity and maintained a sullen silence. Nor did he offer the least resistance when Angela commanded him to rise and proceed to one of the cells whence the State prisoners had just been liberated. Thither was he accordingly escorted by the virgin heroine and her three noble companions; and when they had safely deposited him in the chamber so lately occupied by the Marquis of Schomberg, they drew the bolt upon him and retraced their way down into the hall.

To open the door and pass forth into the yard was now the work of a few moments.

All was still, and no enemy was to be seen in the clear moonlight, Angela threw up a hasty glance towards the windows of Gloria's apartments, but no lamps shone through those lattices now; and the maiden murmured to herself, 'May'st thou pardon me, my generous friend, for the evil manner in which I have requited thine hospitality!'

Opening the grating, she conducted the three nobles along the dark passage leading to the armory, where the lamp was still burning in the place in which she had deposited it.

The Marquis of Schomberg, the

Count of Rosenberg, and the Baron of Altendorf now paused to provide themselves with such weapons as they deemed necessary for their defence in case of need; and having thus rifled the armory of its choicest swords and its keenest daggers, they followed their heroic deliverer, who led the way with the lamp in her hand.

After threading another corridor, they reached the stone stairs leading down to the water, and at the foot of which Angela's boat was moored by the side of the larger one already mentioned. The former was much too small to hold the entire party; they accordingly all four entered the latter, which they pushed along the canal flowing in that caverned passage.

In a few minutes the silver moonlight, playing upon the bosom of the river, became visible outside the arched entrance, and Angela now extinguished the lamp.

Forth from the mouth of the vaulted passage shot the boat; and as it ran into the middle of the stream, the three noblemen looked back upon the mighty towers of that fortalice whence they had just escaped; and they expressed in no measured terms their gratitude to their youthful deliverer. But Angela cut short this effusion of thanks by beseeching them to lose no time in taking counsel together for the security of that freedom which they had thus acquired through her instrumentality; and she bade them observe that it was absolutely necessary to travel all night, so that by morning they might place as considerable distance as possible between themselves and the city of Prague. For certain was it that the fury of Zitzka would know no bounds when their flight should be discovered, and emissaries would be despatched in every direction to overtake and recapture them.

The nobles were struck by the force of these observations on the part of one whose prudence and foresight were equal to the generosity and dauntlessness already displayed; and now was it that a few hastily whispered words were exchanged between the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baron of Altendorf.

'Have your lordships some plan to suggest?' inquired the Count of Rosenberg; 'for we must procure horses somewhere——'

'The Marquis and myself,' said the Baron of Altendorf, in reply, 'are acquainted with a noble lady who possesses a mansion at a short distance from Prague, and thither will we at once proceed. Her ladyship, whose name is doubtless familiar to your lordship's ears——'

'And that name?' said the Count de Rosenberg, interrogatively.

'The Baroness Hamelen,' answered the lord of Altendorf. 'She will receive us courteously and hospitably, and her stables contain fleet horses, which will be at our service. Moreover, she will provide us with a sufficient bodyguard for our protection against any Taborite emissaries who, being sent in pursuit, may chance to overtake us.'

'Her ladyship's humane disposition is known far and wide,' observed the Count de Rosenberg; 'and moreover, she is a true Catholic, and devoted to the cause which we espouse against the Taborite insurgents.'

'To the White Mansion, then,' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, 'will we proceed.'

'And our youthful deliverer, Angelo Wildon, shall accompany us,' added the Count of Rosenberg. 'For inasmuch as he has so gallantly accomplished our freedom, we must surround him now, henceforth, and during the rest of our lives, with our protection, our kindness, and all the comforts and luxuries that we ourselves are accustomed to enjoy.'

This remark was fervently echoed by the Marquis of Schomberg, and likewise assented to by the Baron of Altendorf. Our heroine returned suitable thanks, and gladly availed herself of the proposal that she should remain with those whom she had freed from captivity; for her mission to Prague was now accomplished, and some secret instinct moved her with a desire to behold the White Lady of Altendorf Castle once more.

The three noblemen and Angela landed in safety about a mile beyond the boundary of the southern suburb; and, abandoning the boat to the stream, they hastened in the direction of the Baroness of Hamelen's abode, which was at no considerable distance.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A SCENE AT THE WHITE MANSION.

We must now return to Sir Ernest de Colmar, whom we left in company with the Baroness Hamelen and her

two female dependants, at the moment when the party, being mounted on horseback, set off on a gallop from the picturesque cemetery.

The knight was blindfolded by the hood of the ecclesiastical gown which he had put on in compliance with the lady's hastily whispered entreaty; and the journey was prosecuted in total silence. As on the occasion when Father Cyprian was his guide, De Colmar observed that several useless zigzag movements and circuitous windings were made, evidently to mislead him as to the real distance of the place of destination; but the ride, instead of lasting upwards of an hour and a half as it did in the other case, was now brought to a conclusion in little more than an hour.

Then the party halted for a few moments; the knight heard a massive gate swing slowly round on its groaning hinges, and the hoofs of the horses, once more urged forward, rang upon a stone pavement. The portal closed with a resounding din; the knight was assisted to dismount; the cowl was removed from his eyes, and he found himself, as he had suspected, in the middle of that same spacious court-yard which was so familiar to his memory.

But, assuming looks of admiration and delight as he gazed around on the marble buildings, with their windows of Gothic shape and stained glass, Sir Ernest de Colmar complimented the lady upon the handsome appearance of the dwelling to which she had escorted him; and the baroness, little suspecting that her guest had not only been there, but that he now knew *where* he was and likewise *who* she was, smiled sweetly upon him as she led the way into the handsome hall.

There she consigned him to the care of two elegantly-dressed pages, who escorted him up the splendid staircase to the toilette-chamber, on the threshold of which they left him with an intimation that he would have ample leisure to attire himself in a suitable raiment ere the festivities of the night should commence.

Here we must leave Sir Ernest de Colmar for a short space, while we return to the Baroness Hamelen.

This lady, upon handing over the knight to the care of the pages, as just mentioned, proceeded to a boudoir fitted up in a most gorgeous and voluptuous manner; and there, assisted by four beautiful handmaidens, did she exchange the apparel in which she had been out that day, for a costume the richness and elegance of which were perfectly queen-like. The diamonds that glistened on that robe of purple velvet, were of incalculable price; and on the corsage of the magnificent dress the galaxy of gems shed forth a blaze of light as if to display the snowy stainlessness of the bosom that was half exposed. Upon the lady's rich brown hair the attendants placed a tiara formed of similarly precious stones and diffusing around the same glorious lustre; and thus enveloped, as it were, in a halo of refulgence, the Baroness Hamelen appeared like an imperial sultana as she reclined upon the voluptuous couch where her head-dress was arranged by the skilful hands of her tire-maids.

We have already stated that though in her fortieth year, this lady was endowed with a loveliness so well preserved that she was fully capable of inspiring all the passion which the looks and caresses of youthful beauties are wont to excite in the susceptible heart. Time, in passing over her head, had developed into voluptuous grandeur those charms that must have been ravishing indeed in the days of her early womanhood, but her form, while expanding into the richest contours, had but taken a different style of symmetry—the lines becoming more flowing and the traits more softly rounded. And when we observe that her teeth were as perfect and as brilliantly white as when they shone in the sunny smiles of youth's spring-tide—that her lips were full and of a rich red—that her breath was as fragrant as the fresh air of early morn when the spring-flowers are opening—that her complexion was dazzlingly fair—and that her eyes were of the deepest blue—when we enumerate all these attractions, the reader will perceive that the Baroness Hamelen was indeed, as we have represented her on a former occasion, in every respect a splendid woman.

It was about half-past ten o'clock on the evening when the magnificent toilette of this lady was accomplished: and she was just partaking of some slight refreshment, when a page knocked at the door of the boudoir to announce that Father Cyprian had just arrived at the mansion and demanded an immediate interview with the Baroness. This message was instantaneously conveyed to the noble lady by the handmaiden

who received it: and in a few minutes the baroness repaired to the handsome apartment where the monk was awaiting her presence.

But she was both surprised and alarmed to observe that his countenance was sorely troubled and that he was pacing to and fro in an agitated manner.

'So soon returned!' exclaimed the baroness, accosting him. 'You must have ridden day and night, holy father ——But wherefore are you thus a prey to vexation and annoyance?'

'Your ladyship's folly and indiscretion know no bounds!' cried the priest, fixing ominous and reproachful looks upon her. 'Not content with having the other night introduced Sir Ernest de Colmar's pages into the mansion——'

'But are they not properly disposed of?' demanded the baroness; has not the Bronze Statue done its work? Or is it to tell me the youths have escaped your vigilance, that you have come back so speedily and now look so angrily?'

'No; they have not escaped me, lady,' answered the monk; 'and there can be no doubt that they have perished as they deserve, with the sweet pressure of the Virgin's Kiss,' he added, a ferocious triumph gleaming in his eyes and appearing in his accent. 'But it is not sufficient that they are thus put out of our path, for their master, Sir Ernest de Colmar——'

'What have we to dread at *his* hands?' cried the baroness, interrogatively.

'Everything!' was the impressive response. 'At least my fears indicate this much, else wherefore should he seek admission within these walls?'

'You are speaking in enigmas, Father Cyprian,' exclaimed the lady. 'He has not renewed that application for an interview which he made some time ago, and to which I returned no answer.'

'No; he has not renewed his demand in writing,' said the priest; 'because he has practised a stratagem the boldness of which has been crowned with success. In a word,' added the Carthusian solemnly, the individual who calls himself *Sir Ernest de Colmar* is at this moment an inmate of the White Mansion.'

A light flashed to the mind of the baroness; and turning ale, even beneath the soft tint of the rose which art had shed upon her cheeks, she exclaimed,

'Is it possible that this should be the case?'

'It is so possible,' replied the monk, 'that the groom at the cemetery recognised him just now as the same warrior who accompanied me a few weeks back; and upon learning this fact from the faithful dependant's lips, I hurried hither to ward off, if possible, the storm that is threatening. But how was it that the groom gave you not a hint to the effect that the knight was no stranger to him?'

'The man doubtless supposed that I was well aware of the nature of the step I was taking in thus introducing De Colmar to the mansion,' responded the baroness: 'especially as the rule is occasionally broken——'

'As in the case of the two pages, who were introduced a second time within these walls,' observed the priest, in a tone of bitter ill-humor. 'But I have many things whereupon to consult with you,' he added, assuming a milder voice and throwing himself on a downy ottoman.

'I am all attention,' said the baroness, taking a seat near him; 'and we have yet more than an hour to midnight.'

'First and foremost,' resumed the Carthusian, 'let me ask you whether any dependant of your household is missing?'

'Yes; Dame Martha,' exclaimed the baroness. 'You remember the particular evening that she met you at the village-inn near the heath, when she brought you the disguise that you had ordered to be conveyed thither?'

'Most assuredly do I recollect the evening well,' answered the priest; 'for after my interview on that occasion with the old woman, circumstances induced me to hasten hither—and well was it that I took this step, inasmuch as I arrived in time to prevent the flight of the Princess and to capture the two pages of Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'True,' observed the Baroness: 'but it is ever since that night whereof we are speaking that Dame Martha has disappeared—for *she* is the dependant whom I have missed.'

'And at the same time that I was travelling southward on horseback,' said the priest, 'the old woman was hastening in the same direction with the tide of the Moldau.'

'What mean you, holy father?' asked the Baroness, shuddering at the suspicion which sprang up, though dimly and vaguely, in her mind.

'I mean that she was murdered and thrown into the river,' rejoined the Carthusian.

'Murdered!' repeated the Baroness. 'I indeed fancied, from what you said, that she might have been accidentally drowned——'

'No — she was murdered — foully murdered!' interrupted the Carthusian.

'But who could have done this?' exclaimed the Baroness Hamelen.

'Sister Marietta, or Gloria, as she calls herself,' returned the priest, in a low and gloomy tone. 'And the proof, here it is!' he added, producing from beneath his garments the long flexible poniard which had been extricated from the bosom of Dame Martha's corpse.

The Baroness instantly took the weapon—examining it with a nervous and agitated eagerness—and, returning it to the Carthusian, said, 'Yes, that indeed is Gloria's poniard! But is she now acting on the offensive towards us? If so ——'

And the lady's trepidation became so great that it choked her utterance.

'I can scarcely believe that she will so far disregard her tremendous oath,' observed the priest, 'as to communicate *all* and *everything* to Zitzka——'

'Oh! heaven forbid!' exclaimed the Baroness, her whole frame convulsing with terror at the bare thought of such a casualty. 'Were that monster and his savage hordes once let loose upon us, what chance of escape should we have? what mercy could we expect? Oh! better, better far were it to be chased even by blood-hounds through the trackless forest, than to become the prey of the ruthless Taborites!'

'Tranquillise yourself, lady,' said the priest; 'and let us not abandon ourselves to despair. Five days have elapsed since Dame Martha was missing; five days, then, have passed since Gloria murdered her. In the interval nothing more has been done by that incomprehensible being—no farther proof has she given of a design to act upon the offensive. From this fact I deduce hopes favorable to ourselves; and perhaps it was in a moment of passion—or may be in consequence of some dispute arising from a sudden meeting between them—that Gloria made away with the old woman.'

'And you discovered her corpse in the river?' said the baroness, musing nervously upon the indistinct dangers which seemed to be menacing her.

'At more than two days journey from Prague, while proceeding with the pages to Altendorf Castle, did I find the body,' answered the priest. 'The current had borne it along to that distance, as if Providence were determined to throw it in my way, either as a warning to ourselves or that so foul a murder might be terribly avenged!'

'And, if I mistake not,' observed the Baroness Hamelen, 'Dame Martha was engaged on special business for yourself, holy father, at the time when she thus met her death?'

'It was so,' replied the priest. 'On that evening when she met me at the hostel near the heath, I encountered at the same place and at about the same time a young woman named Angela Wildon. This maiden, of great beauty and innocence, is beloved by Lord Rodolph; and the young nobleman is so deeply infatuated with the object of his engrossing passion, that although she is nothing more than a peasant-girl and of the humblest condition, he would make her his wife rather than lose all chance of possessing her. A short time ago she was his prisoner in Altendorf Castle, where I happened to see her; and on meeting her again the other night at the village-hostel, I instantaneously recognised her. It struck me that she had escaped from Altendorf Castle, and that she had journeyed to so great a distance in order to avoid the persecution and importunity of Lord Rodolph. For she loves him not, it appears——'

'And in what manner does this affair regard *you*,' demanded the baroness, impatiently, 'or so long a story regard *me?*'

'Listen, dear lady,' said the priest; 'and you shall judge whether I had any reason to trouble myself concerning this Angela Wildon. I have already told you how I met her at the hostel; and as she is surpassingly beautiful, I fancied that she would become no unworthy addition to the brilliant galaxy of earthly houris shining within these walls. Nay, more, I was well aware that the Baron of Altendorf, if made acquainted with all the circumstances respecting his son's love for the maiden, would be deeply grateful to us for rendering her an inmate of this mansion, and thus raising up between herself and Lord Rodolph a barrier which the young nobleman himself would consider insuperable, should he chance to encounter her again. With these views in my mind, I dropped certain hints to Angela at the hostel, to the effect that I would under-

take to place her in the care of a worthy lady of my acquaintance; but our discourse was cut short by the arrival of Dame Martha. To another room did I accompany the old woman, and there we conversed at length upon many matters. At last it suddenly struck me that the partition-wall was a mere boarding, and available for eaves-droppers. Terrified with the conviction that several things had been spoken by Dame Martha and myself which were dangerous to be heard by strangers, I made inquiries of the landlord and found that the adjacent room had been appropriated to Angela Wildon. But she had fled in the meantime—yes, fled with a haste and an evident alarm which had surprised the people at the inn, but which only frightened without amazing me. For all the indiscretion of which I had been guilty in thus incautiously speaking aloud on secret matters, was rendered terribly vivid to my mind; and I felt convinced that Angela had heard enough to prompt her to so precipitate a flight. Then that design of making her an inmate of the sisterhood of the White Mansion—a design which was mere policy in the first instance, now became a necessity—an absolute necessity; and instead of immediately assuming the disguise which the old woman had brought me, and in which I had purposed to penetrate into the Castle of Prague and attempt the rescue of the State prisoners—instead of at once undertaking that enterprise, I say, I despatched Dame Martha in pursuit of the maiden, while I hastened hither to send off some of our sworn servitors on the same mission. And fortunate, was it, as I have already observed, that I did visit the mansion on that particular night, and that very hour; inasmuch as my presence defeated the schemes of De Colmar's pages to carry off the Princess of Bohemia.'

'And your Reverence has neither heard nor seen any more of this Angela Wildon?' said the Baroness Hamelen, inquiringly.

'How could I?' exclaimed the Carthusian. 'Scarcely had I set foot within these walls, on the particular occasion of which we have been speaking, when the occurrence of that adventure with the pages compelled me to hurry off for Altendorf Castle—which place I did not reach after all; for the discovery of Dame Martha's body on the morning of the third day's journey, induced me to retrace my way without loss of time. And, behold! most fortunate was this resolution on my part; for on arriving at the cemetery this evening—wearied, exhausted, and worn out with six days' severe travelling—I learnt, as I have already explained, that a certain knight had passed that way in your company an hour previously; and the description given by the groom proved at once that it was the personage calling himself Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'Now we have come back to the point whence we started at the beginning of this long discourse,' said the baroness; then after glancing at the clepsydra which stood on an elegant table, she observed, 'There are yet twenty minutes to midnight, and the Austrian is in the toilette-chamber. What course shall we adopt?'

'Under what circumstances did you become acquainted with him?' inquired the priest.

'I was walking in Prague, when I beheld him,' answered the lady; 'and being struck by his appearance, I afforded him an opportunity of addressing me. You may conjecture the rest.'

'Did he mention your ladyship by name?' asked the Carthusian.

'No—he seemed to be utterly ignorant who I was; and he stated that he himself was Sir Louis de Hazburgh.'

'Then did he know right well who you were,' exclaimed the priest; 'and he purposely threw himself in your way in order to obtain admission to the mansion. The circumstance of giving the false name places this matter beyond all question; and for once in my life I am at a loss how to act—what course to adopt—what policy to pursue.'

'The knight is in our power, and we can punish him terribly for any treacherous designs which he may contemplate,' observed the baroness. 'Why do you hesitate? On every other occasion when an enemy or a traitor has fallen into your hands, holy father, your decision has been prompt—your orders have been instantaneously executed, and the Bronze Statue has received its victim in due course. Wherefore, then, are you wavering now? what talisman of security does this Austrian possess? what vengeance can menace us as the result of consigning him to a well-merited doom? For, in addition to the treacherous intent which has no doubt prompted him to seek admission here this night, is he not an impostor? has not this point been satisfactorily es-

tablished by the emissary whom we sent to Vienna? and did not the Baron of Altendorf unmask the cheat at the council table?'

'Ah! but your ladyship forgets that this self-styled Sir Ernest de Colmar did really possess a credential signed by the Duke of Austria and the Lord High-Chancellor of that Duchy,' observed the priest, 'and that the Baron of Altendorf effaced those signatures by means of a chemical preparation wherewith he had provided himself for the special purpose.

'Then the possession of such a credential would seem to have proved that the Austrian was no impostor,' said the Baroness, 'but that our messenger must have made some mistake in his inquiries and researches at Vienna.'

'Our impression at the time when the Council met,' returned the Carthusian, 'was that the signatures were really forgeries; but as there were no positive means of demonstrating this fact on the day when the Bohemian nobles assembled, and as it was nevertheless important to throw all possible discredit on De Colmar and exclude him from the Council, the scheme of erasing the signatures was adopted.—This the Baron of Altendorf undertook to do, and cleverly enough he managed the task. The stratagem would have produced the desired effect and De Colmar would have been ignominiously expelled, had not the sudden appearance of Zitzka completely changed the aspect of affairs.'

'But wherefore did you take so much trouble to destroy the character of the Austrian upon that occasion?' demand the Baroness. 'This was a point which I could not comprehend at the time.'

'Because the Baron of Altendorf and myself suspected him of some sinister policy which we could not comprehend, but which we believed to be hostile to our own schemes,' continued Father Cyprian, in explanation. 'You remember the mysterious letter which Lord Rodolph sent to the Baron, and of which the Knight himself was the bearer? It was that missive which engendered all the suspicions that led to so many useless precautions——'

'Useless precautions?' ejaculated the Baroness in suprise.

'Yes, useless precautions,' repeated Father Cyprian, 'not only because they were rendered unnecessary by the breaking-up of the Council in so sudden a manner, but likewise because the whole train of our notions respecting De Colmar was based in error and misunderstanding——'

'Then is he no impostor? and were not the signatures of his credential forged?' demanded the Baroness Hamelen, with increasing amazement.

'So far from being an impostor, my dear lady,' responded the Carthusian solemnly, 'he is really a Knight, if he chooses to call himself so; and he is fully entitled to assume not only the name of De Colmar but likewise that of Hazburgh. As for forgery, he is incapable of such a deed! In a word ——But I must interrupt myself to inform you that while on the road to Altendorf Castle, I learnt from the lips of the pages a secret concerning their master, this Austrian of whom we have been speaking so much, a secret the revelation of which flashed like a blaze of light athwart the darkness of my mind, rendering clear and apparent in a moment all that was before obscure, sinister, and unintelligible.'

'And that secret?' exclaimed the Baroness, inquiringly.

'Is of such vital importance that only in a whisper may it be breathed,' added the priest.

'Keep me not in suspense,' cried the noble lady. 'Tell me your secret.—Who is this Sir Ernest de Colmar, that you hesitate to give him up as a victim to the Bronze Statue? Who is he, I say?' she demanded, with increasing impatience.

The Carthusian approached his lips to her ear and whispered a few words.

The Baroness turned her head towards him with a species of convulsive start, and fixed her eyes upon his countenance in mingled amazement and incredulity.

'Lady, I never jest,' he said in a solemn tone: 'and even if I did, this would not be the occasion nor that personage the subject.'

'I am surprised beyond all power of expression—bewildered beyond all conjecture on my part,' exclaimed the baroness. 'Ah! well indeed may you hesitate how to proceed——'

'And yet time is wearing on,' said the priest, glancing towards the clepsydra: 'tis now within a few minutes of midnight, and the silver bell will sound its summons shortly.'

'Oh! I am in no humor for pleasure and gaiety now,' cried the Baroness Hamelen. 'A weight sits upon my soul, a sense of suffocation prevails in

my throat; I feel as if swayed by the presentiment that something terrible is about to happen. For surely *he* would not have taken so much pains and trouble to obtain admission here, unless he had some grand and important object in view, and unless he had taken every precaution to provide for his safety. Oh! perhaps he had spies set to watch whither I should lead him—and those spies may have already adopted measures that may prove ruinous to us all——'

'Give not way to useless lamentations,' interrupted the monk sternly. 'Perchance he has taken the present course simply and solely for the purpose of delivering the Princess Elizabetha from restraint: or perhaps he has obtained some clue respecting his lost pages, whom he may have traced as far as the portals of this mansion. But the fate of these youths he never, never can discover—unless indeed the whole mystery of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue shall become developed to his knowledge; and this is far from probable. At all events, it is now of the utmost importance for us to ascertain the drift and meaning of his present conduct, so that we may determine whether to treat him fairly or foully.'

'And how is that point to be gleaned?' demanded the baroness.

'By the wit of woman,' was the immediate response, accompanied by a significant look.

'You would have me exercise my ingenuity in this respect?' said the noble lady, inquiringly.

'None other can I trust—none other would succeed,' answered the priest, strongly accenting every word. 'You must obtain an immediate interview with this guest whose presence so cruelly embarrasses us.'

'Listen, then, to what I am about to say,' observed the baroness, after a few moments' profound reflection. 'In the Gallery of Porcelain Vases shall the interview take place; and if by the time the hands of yon clepsydra mark the half-hour past midnight—if by that time, I say, I do not return to you *here*—then will you conclude that I am either in some danger, or that there is no hope of dealing fairly and peaceably in this matter.'

'I understand you,' said the Carthusian. 'If you do not return to this apartment within the half-hour after midnight, I shall unhesitatingly despatch assistance to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases.'

'I rely upon you, holy father,' said the baroness: and, having thus spoken, she quitted the apartment where her long conference with the priest had taken place.

In the splendidly-lighted passage which the baroness now entered, she paused for a moment to give instructions to a page whom she encountered there.

'Ermach, you will repair to the toilette-chamber,' she said; 'and instead of escorting *the stranger-guest* to the Grand Saloon of Pleasure, according to the usage of this mansion, you will conduct him to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases.'

The page bowed and retired; and the baroness passed on to the place which she had just named.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BARONESS AND THE KNIGHT.

The Gallery of Porcelain Vases was one of the most elegant features of the White Mansion. Though not of any considerable extent, it was well calculated to excite feelings of pleasure and admiration; for its own architectural beauty was of a rare perfection, and it contained some of the must superb specimens of porcelain ever seen in Europe. The alabaster lamps suspended to the ceiling shed forth a yellow lustre which was reflected in roseate, purple, and crimson beams from the variegated vases; and the atmosphere was rendered fresh and fragrant by the quantities of flowers dispersed about the gallery.

To this charming place did the baroness repair: and, composing her thoughts and her features as well as she was able, she awaited the coming of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

In the meantime the young page Ermach, who was a handsome youth of about seventeen, hastened to the toilette chamber, where the knight, having apparelled himself in a rich dress, was expecting with some degree of impatience the promised summons to the festivities of the night. Not that he panted for pleasure of any kind on this occasion: but he was desirous of seeing how he might turn the progress of events to his own purposes, and thence

work out the object of his visit to the mansion.

'May it please you, sir,' said the young page Ermach, entering the chamber with a low obeisance, 'my noble mistress has sent me to conduct you to her presence.'

'I am prepared to follow you, fair youth,' answered De Colmar. 'But in the first place permit me to have a word with you.'

'With me, sir!' ejaculated Ermach, starting with surprise.

'Yes; with you,' cried De Colmar, clutching him by the shoulder: then, speaking in a low, rapid, and emphatic voice, he said, 'There is something in your countenance, boy, which betokens an ingenuous soul and an honest frankness of character. If I be deceived, then never was a false heart more skilfully concealed under a winning mask. But, by heaven! I have touched some tender chord in your breast!' exclaimed the knight: 'for you are weeping; you are weeping!'

'Oh! sir—the words which you have uttered had a kindness in them——'

But the youth could say no more: his voice was choked with sobs.

'Now calm yourself, poor boy,' said De Colmar, in a tone so soothing that Ermach looked up and smiled through his tears with an expression of boundless gratitude. 'What can I do for you? Tell me—'

'Oh! take me hence; help me to get away from this place!' exclaimed the youth, clasping his hands in passionate entreaty.

'I will—I will!' returned the knight. 'But tranquillise yourself and answer me a few questions.'

'Anything I can—everything I know,' cried the boy hastily. 'But delay not, or suspicion will be engendered: for within these accursed walls, mistrust prevails constantly and everywhere.'

'I pledge my word that I will bear thee hence, if thou wilt but show me the best and most ready means of egress when the moment comes that I may wish to depart,' said Sir Ernest: 'and thou shalt enter my service, which is the service of an honest man!' he added proudly.

'Heaven's blessing be upon your head!' murmured Ermach, well nigh overcome by feelings of joy, surprise, and gratitude—for he could scarcely believe that such sudden good fortune was otherwise than a dream. 'And now,' he exclaimed, dashing away the tears from his cheeks, 'I pray thee, sir, to hasten and question me in whatever manner thou wilt, for we must not tarry here many minutes longer. It would be as much as my life is worth—Oh! yes, my very life, if I were found thus conversing.'

'We will not waste another moment, boy,' interrupted De Colmar. 'Tell me, then, whether within the last five or six days, two tall and handsome youths, nineteen years of age, and dressed in green velvet doublets ——'

'Yes, the two youths whom you thus describe, were introduced hither a few nights back,' exclaimed Ermach. 'They changed their apparel in this room, and here,' he continued, opening a chest in one corner of the apartment, 'are the garments which they wore when they arrived.'

'The same, the very same!' ejaculated De Colmar, instantaneously recognising the ordinary attire of his two missing servitors. 'Thank God! I have succeeded in tracing the poor boys thus far. But tell me, good youth—tell me ——'

'Oh! if you mean to ask me what has become of those two youths,' interrupted Ermach, 'I am unable to answer you. That they disappeared suddenly, is certain; but how or wherefore I know not. And now, kind sir, I implore thee to hasten and bring thy questioning to an end,' exclaimed the youth, evidently laboring under a nervous agitation that was rapidly increasing into actual terror.

'One word more,' said the Knight, 'is Father Cyprian known to you? and is he within these walls at this moment?'

'He arrived here this evening, about an hour and a half ago,' responded the page; 'and her ladyship was alone with him, no doubt in deep conference, until the moment when she sent me hither to conduct you to her presence.'

'Ah! so the priest is here?' observed De Colmar, in a musing tone, 'then, it behoves me to act alike with promptitude and caution. Boy,' he added, turning toward the page, 'I have promised to take thee into my service; and I do not regret that pledge. Thy frankness has won my confidence, and thine open countenance has not belied your disposition. I am now prepared to follow thee to the presence of thy mistress; but it may be that our interview will prove a short one, and it may likewise happen that I shall be compelled

to fight my way forth from this mansion.'

'So soon as I have shown thee the way, good sir, to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases,' said Ermach, 'I shall at once repair to the great hall below, and there will I wait your arrival. Any farther duty this night will I contrive to elude, so that I may remain in the hall until you make your appearance. Then follow me whithersoever I may lead, no matter where, and I take God to witness that my guidance will be marked by fidelity, even if it should chance to fail of success.'

'I believe you,—I believe you,' said the Knight, pressing the youth's hand warmly. 'Candor is written in every lineament of your countenance. 'If you were to deceive me, there would be an end to all confidence in human nature.'

'I am incapable of treachery,' answered the boy proudly. 'And now, kind sir, I beseech thee, let us delay no longer.'

'Lead on,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar.

The youthful page threw open the door of the toilette-chamber and conducted the Knight aloug the splendidly-lighted passage to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases; but ere the gilded portal closed behind De Colmar, as Ermach stepped back from the threshold, rapid glances of intelligence were exchanged between them, reminding each other of the understanding to which they had come.

The door was shut, and the Knight found himself alone with the Baroness, who advanced to meet him with a smiling countenance.

'I have tarried for you with some impatience, Sir Louis de Hazburgh,' she said, proffering him her hand, which he raised to his lips in obedience to the courteous usage of the period; then, taking his arm, the Baroness observed, as she led him gently along the gallery, 'Your manner is full of restraint, you seem pre-occupied, and yet you are in a mansion where the genuis of pleasure presides. Oh! if you have any secret weighing upon your mind, and would make me your confidant, how truly happy should I be either to counsel or console.'

'Remember, lady,' answered the knight, 'that our acquaintance dates only from a few hours back——'

'Ah! then you propose to treat me with a cold formality,' exclaimed the baroness, throwing upon him a look full of tender reproach. 'Wherefore, then, did you accompany me hither? what object had you in view? Oh! unless you were prepared to surrender yourself up to love and pleasure, it was an act of perfidy to induce me to bring your excellency hither.'

'And suppose that I had really some ulterior aim to accomplish?' said the knight, interrogatively.

'Then should I cheerfully assist you to the utmost of my power,' was the immediate response. 'You do not know me well as yet, it is true; but if you ever come to know me better, you will perhaps appreciate my friendship. At all events, you would place confidence in me, and in so doing, you would not be deceived. Now tell me, Sir Knight, tell me what this ulterior aim may be, which you seek to accomplish?'

'Is it possible that deception lurks beneath so much seductive courtesy?' exclaimed De Colmar, dropping the arm of the baroness and pausing to gaze searchingly upon her countenance.

'Oh! what mean you, Sir Knight?' she demanded, assuming so deprecating, innocent, and affrighted a look that she seemed at the moment a coy girl of eighteen or twenty rather than a splendidly-matured woman in the prime of life. 'You would not harm me? you could not find it in your heart to do me an injury? But I see that you entertain some injurious suspicion concerning me, and the thought cuts me to the quick!'

'Lady, you are either the veriest hypocrite in the universe,' cried Sir Ernest de Colmar, 'or else you are the most unfortunate dupe that ever was deceived by villains!'

'Ah! then it must be the latter—oh! believe me, it is the latter!' exclaimed the baroness, joining her hands and extending them beseechingly towards the knight; but at the same instant she glanced towards a water-clock which stood in the gallery, and she felt an indescribable relief at observing that it only wanted five minutes to the half-hour past midnight.

'Then if you be really a dupe, and not an accomplice,' said De Colmar, his manner becoming suddenly stern and his mien gradually imposing, 'I charge you to give true and faithful answers to the queries which I am about to put to you.'

'Speak—speak!' exclaimed the terrified woman, shrinking from that god-

like air of avenging justice which seemed to grow upon the Austrian warrior like a halo of supernal lustre.

'Baroness Hamelen,' he cried, it is useless that I should maintain any farther duplicity towards you. The name by which I have introduced myself to you is a feigned one, and I am Sir Ernest de Colmar! Now tell me at once —this instant—and equivocate not, but say, what has become of my two faithful pages?'

'Your pages!' ejaculated the baroness, darting a rapid glance of uneasiness towards the water-clock.

'Yes; the two faithful youths whom I have succeeded in tracing to the White Mansion!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'Speak, wretched woman!' he cried, drawing his dagger, 'or I will not spare you!'

'Mercy—mercy!' shrieked the baroness, falling upon her knees and clasping her hands with frantic gesture.

'Mercy! for what?' thundered De Colmar. 'Is it a confession of murder that is implied by that prayer?'

'Mercy, I say, mercy!' screamed the baroness, her wildly-flashing eyes glancing towards the clock.

It was the half-hour!

'Ah! then thou art a murderess, vile wretch, or leagued with murderers,' exclaimed the knight; 'and, woman though thou art, yet shall my vengeance——'

'Spare me! spare me!' shrieked the baroness, as the poniard glistened before her eyes.

'Confess all—everything!' cried De Colmar, 'or, by the heaven above us—'

His words were cut short by the sudden opening of the door, and a posse of armed men, wearing black masks, rushed into the room.

The baroness sprang to her feet with an exulting cry, at the same instant that those *sworn servitors of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue* made De Colmar their prisoner.

But scarcely had this incident taken place, when the door was again burst violently open, and a figure in complete armor, with closed vizor, entered the Gallery of Porcelain Vases.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FATHER CYPRIAN AND THE FOREST MAIDEN.

We must now return to Angela and the three noblemen whom we left at the moment when, having landed on the bank of the Moldau, about a mile to the southward of Prague, they took the nearest route towards the White Mansion.

It was a little past midnight when they reached this splendid edifice, and on the wicket in the principal gate being opened to them, the porter immediately recognised the Baron of Altendorf and the Marquis of Schomberg, to whom he made a low obeisance. It was evident that their appearance at the mansion both amazed and delighted the official; for he was of course no stranger to the fact that Zitzka had retained them captive in the Castle of Prague, and hence the mingled feelings which their unexpected presence excited in his mind.

'Is her ladyship at home?' inquired the Marquis of Schomberg.

'Yes, my lord, and will be overjoyed to welcome *you*,' responded the porter, with a significancy which made the nobleman contract his brows with a deprecating expression, while he glanced hastily towards the Count de Rosenberg and Angela, as much as to remind the menial that there were strangers present.

The marquis and the baron then led the way across the spacious court-yard, the count and our heroine following them. Entering the hall, they were immediately accosted by three or four pages, among whom was Ermach—this youth having that moment retired from the interview with Sir Ernest de Colmar, as related in the preceding chapter The presence of the marquis and baron excited on the part of these pages similar feelings to those already experienced by the porter at the gate; and they offered their congratulations to the two noblemen on their deliverance from captivity.

'We thank ye sincerely, young sirs,' said the Marquis, hastily, 'and we peg that four good steeds may be saddled without delay for our use.'

'Likewise that an escort of at least eight men be ordered to attend upon us,' added the Baron of Altendorf.—'And now that you have heard our commands, see that they be executed promptly, while some refreshments are served up to us.'

'Father Cyprian is here, my lord,' said one of the pages.

'Ah! so much the better,' exclaimed the Marquis of Schomberg. 'He will counsel us how to proceed——'

'On behalf of our unhappy country,' added the Baron of Altendorf. 'We should, therefore, do well to see his Reverence at once. Lead the way, boy, to an apartment, and then hasten to inform her ladyship and Father Cyprian that we are within these walls.'

'His Reverence is not in the Grand Saloon, my lord,' said the page, 'but in deep consultation with her ladyship in a private apartment——'

'No,' interrupted Ermach, 'his Reverence is now alone, for her ladyship is in the Gallery of Porcelain Vases with a stranger.'

'Then conduct us to the presence of Father Cyprian,' said the Marquis of Schomberg, 'and let not the Baroness be disturbed for the moment, as the business on which she is engaged may be important.'

One of the pages now hastened to order the horses, another to command the escort of armed men to get ready, a third to see that refreshments were served up speedily, and a fourth led the way to the apartment where the Baroness Hamelen had left Father Cyprian. But Ermach, faithful to his understanding with De Colmar, remained in the hall.

We must now observe that the instant the name of Father Cyprian was mentioned, an ice-chill struck to the heart of Angela; and a train of startling reminiscences and reflections swept through her mind like a whirlwind.—For she not only recollected the solemn warning which Gloria had given her against that man, but she also remembered that the radiant being had enjoined her not to accept of the hospitality of anybody connected with him. And now it flashed to her mind that this Baroness Hamelen, in whose abode she was, might be the very lady of whom the priest had spoken in such laudatory terms, and to whom he had proposed to introduce her. This idea was no sooner conceived than it became a settled conviction in her breast; and the maiden instantaneously felt that she was standing on the brink of some new danger, or was on the point of encountering some fresh adventure. She was however confident that the Lord of Rosenberg was an honest, good, and upright man, whatever the other two nobles might be; and she had not failed to observe that while they were evidently well known at the mansion, the count was as much a stranger there as herself. Moreover, when they had spoken of Father Cyprian, his lordship joined not in their discourse; and the inference which Angela drew was that he had no acquaintance with the priest.—All these reflections and observations served to place our heroine upon her guard in respect to the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baron of Altendorf, and to rely more than ever upon the assistance of the Count of Rosenberg in case of any danger or treachery transpiring.

For an instant it struck her that she would close her vizor, so as to prevent Father Cyprian from recognizing her countenance; but then she recollected that her companions would doubtless allude to her in his presence as *Angelo Wildon*, and a man of his shrewdness would instantaneously suspect that under the male accoutrements and the masculine name, *Angela Wildon* was in reality concealed; whereas if she could succeed in unaffectedly maintaining the character she had assumed, she might perhaps pass herself off as a brother of Angela, in the same way as she had done with the Count de Rosenberg.

Maintaining therefore her face uncovered, and settling her features in such a manner as to meet unabashed the first look of recognition which she must expect to encounter from Father Cyprian, she paced boldly up the marble stairs in company with the three nobles. The page led the way along the well-lighted passage, the atmosphere of which was fragrant with the perfume of flowers; and throwing open a door, he stood aside to allow the four visitors to pass into the room.

From a seat in that superb apartment leapt Father Cyprian, with an ejaculation of the most profound surprise, as the rapid glance which he threw upon the party showed him the countenances of the marquis and the baron, who were his intimate friends, and that of Lord de Rosenberg, who was known to him by sight. Then his looks fell on our heroine, and he started with even a still greater surprise as he beheld the charming and classic features of the forest-maiden.

'What miracle has been achieved this night?' he exclaimed, his bewildered glances once more sweeping the party, consisting of the three noblemen and the armed damsel.

'Behold our deliverer!' said the Marquis of Schomberg, pointing towards Angela.

'Do my eyes deceive me? is it pos-

sible?' ejaculated the priest, drawing nearer to the maiden, and fixing his keen looks searchingly upon her.

'Your manner would imply, holy father, that you had some knowledge of me,' said Angela, enduring his penetrating stare with a mingled expression of haughtiness, surprise, and curiosity; 'and yet my memory fails me sadly as to where, when, and how, we may have met before.'

'If it suit thee to play the *unknown* towards me, I will not mar thy game,' observed the priest, suddenly stepping close up to Angela, and giving utterance to these words in a whisper inaudible to the three nobles; then, before the maiden had time to speak a single syllable in reply, he said aloud, 'If this comely youth be really your deliverer, my lords, ye must admit that a good deed was never performed by a more suitable agent.'

'Angelo Wildon is deserving of all our gratitude,' exclaimed the Count de Rosenberg. 'His sister Angela has long been known to me—indeed, ever since her infancy; and I can honestly declare that the brother's chivalry is only equalled by the maiden's virtue.'

'Ah! then you have a sister, fair youth?' said the priest, once more fixing his eyes so peculiarly upon our heroine that she saw he had read her secret, so completely as to defy all attempts at mystification.

'Have you nothing more important to talk about than my affairs?' she exclaimed, with a petulance which she could not altogether subdue; 'for meseems,' she added in a milder tone, though still assuming the voice and offhand manner of the rougher sex, 'meseems that the sooner our journey is continued the better, inasmuch as John Zitzka is not likely to lose a moment in sending forth emissaries in all directions, the instant the escape of their lordships shall be discovered. And this escape is probably known even now—for at the first changing of the guard was it certain to be detected.'

'The youth speaks reasonably,' said the Marquis of Schomberg. 'In a few minutes we will depart. But I must have one word first with the excellent baroness——'

'You cannot disturb her ladyship just for the present, my lord,' interrupted the priest, as he glanced towards the clepsydra, and noticed that it wanted ten minutes to the half hour past midnight. 'But as I am well aware that the Count de Rosenberg is a staunch friend to the cause of Catholicism and monarchy—and as we must likewise conclude that this fair youth here entertains the same noble sentiments, seeing that he has undertaken and accomplished the chivalrous task of delivering your lordships from the captivity in which the bloodthirsty Zitzka held you,—under these circumstances, I say, it is clear that we all present are united by a common interest in religious and political matters. Therefore I shall not hesitate to speak before his lordship of Rosenberg and the gallant Angelo Wildon; and I will at once frankly inform you that the baroness is at this moment engaged in conference with Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'Sir Ernest de Colmar!' ejaculated the Baron of Altendorf, in a tone of such amazement that the sudden start which Angela gave at the same instant was unperceived even by the lynx eyes and ubiquitous glances of the Carthusian. 'What can that impostor have to communicate to the Baroness Hamelen?'

'That is a point which I should likewise wish explained,' observed the Marquis of Schomberg, also speaking in a tone of deep curiosity.

The Count of Rosenberg said nothing; and Angela effected to have her attention suddenly drawn to a fine painting on the wall, in which direction she turned and gazed as if the conversation were now upon a topic wherein she had not the slightest interest.

'I have not leisure now to give your lordships full explanations,' said the Carthusian, 'nor should I have wasted time by communicating to you the fact that the baroness is thus engaged with Sir Ernest de Colmar, were it not that the interview promises important results. For this De Colmar is no impostor after all——'

'But does he possess the influence requisite to induce the Duke of Austria to assist us with an army against the rebel Taborites!' demanded the Baron of Altendorf.

'He does,' answered the Carthusian, in a solemn tone and with impressive manner. 'During the last few days, strange facts have become known to me, strange things have occurred, and if your lordships were not bound by prudence to depart so speedily, we might perhaps hold a council the results of which would enable us to take the initiative in large and comprehensive measures on behalf of Bohemia. But

such a council may be yet held by us within a few days, and at Altendorf Castle, which must become the head-quarters of any operations that we may be enabled to undertake for the suppression of the Taborite dominion.—That is to say,' added the Carthusian, glancing uneasily towards the clepsydra, 'if this conference between the baroness and Sir Ernest de Colmar should lead to any results beneficial to our cause.'

'And yet your looks are anxious and unsettled, holy father?' said the Baron of Altendorf.

At this moment the door was thrown open, and two domestics, each bearing a massive silver tray laden with cold viands and flagons of generous liquor, entered the apartment. The reply which the Carthusian was about to give the baron, was therefore checked by the presence of the menials; and once more glancing uneasily towards the water-clock, Father Cyprian saw that it was close upon the half hour.

The three noblemen advanced to the table on which the refreshments were spread; and the priest, unable to delay any longer the promised succor to the baroness, seized one of the domestics by the arm as the man was about to quit the room, and said, 'Order the armed servitors to repair this instant to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases, and arrest the stranger whom they shall find there with her ladyship.'

This command was issued in a low, hurried, but impressive whisper; and the domestic to whom it was given bowed and retired. The Carthusian then hastened to join the three nobles at the table; and at the same moment Angela abruptly quitted the room.

'Ah! whither has our youthful friend gone?' exclaimed Father Cyprian, springing towards the door; for, like a flash of lightning, did it strike him that she was standing just near enough at the time to catch the words which he had whispered in the ear of the domestic, and a presentiment of some ulterior aim on her part sprang up in his soul.

He darted towards the door, we say, but that presentiment was instantly confirmed; for Angela had fastened the gilded portal outside!

The truth was just as he had suspected. While still affecting to be intent on contemplating the picture, and in an absorption of manner so well assumed as utterly to throw the priest off his guard as to the possibility of his being overheard, she had caught the whispered command; and from everything which had previously been said, she felt convinced in a moment that it was none other than Sir Ernest de Colmar who was to be arrested. Not an instant did she hesitate how to act! There was but one door to the apartment; and, when entering the room, she had observed that the means of fastening that door were not wanting on the outside.

Her escape from the apartment was accordingly effected with the promptitude we have noticed, and her hand drew the bolt which barred the egress of those within. She had no time to give the slightest intimation of her object to the Count de Rosenberg; and she was therefore compelled to make him a prisoner along with the rest.

On finding herself in the passage, she darted a rapid glance up and down, and she caught a glimpse of the retreating figure of that domestic who had received the Carthusian's whispered order, just at the moment that the man entered a room farther along the corridor. She advanced in the same direction, the thick carpet rendering her steel-bound feet noiseless as they paced onwards. A door opened—it was that of the room which the servant had entered; and Angela stood aside, concealing herself behind a marble pillar.

Scarcely had she taken her position there, when she beheld three armed men, wearing half-masks upon their countenances, and accompanied by the domestic, cross the passage and burst into the Gallery of Porcelain Vases, the gilded portal of which faced the room whence they had emerged. That massive door clanged behind the bravos; but Angela, instantly closing her vizor and drawing her sword, hastened thither.

Thus no sooner had the portal shut behind the armed servitors of the Bronze Statue, when it was burst open again, and Angela rushed into the Gallery of Porcelain Vases, as already described at the end of the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONFLICTS.

THE position of affairs, at the moment when the forest maiden, clad in

her suit of complete armor and with the vizor closed, burst into the gallery, may be described in a few words.

The Baroness Hamelen had started to her feet with an exulting cry; De Colmar, utterly taken by surprise, was in the power of the three sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue; and the domestic was standing a little way apart, ready to afford assistance to the bravos, if his aid were needed.

But the sudden appearance of our heroine so startled the three armed men that they relaxed their hold for an instant on the knight, who, availing himself of this circumstance, broke away from them, drew his sword as if it were a gleam of lightning flashing from his scabbard, and in another moment was by the side of Angela. For although he had not the slightest idea who the armed being was—much less that it was a female, and *that female* the forest-maiden—yet he instinctively saw by the way in which she had rushed in and the attitude she took with her drawn sword in her hand, that the arrival was of friendly intent towards himself and of hostile import to his enemies.

The Baroness Hamelen screamed and darted behind the three bravos, as if to place them between herself and the vengeance which she felt to be so justly her due; and then the ruffians sprang forward to make a desperate onslaught upon the knight and Angela. But sturdily and resolutely were they met; and the domestic, wielding a sword with which he was provided, instantaneously joined the masked assailants.

The odds were thus four to two, and of the two *one* was a woman!

'Back, villains!' cried De Colmar, 'or you will force us to shed your blood!'

'Yield not—retreat not—I command you!' exclaimed the baroness to the servitors of the Bronze Statue. 'Drive them away from the door, and I will hasten forth to procure additional assistance!'

'Then will we maintain our position *here*, or perish!' spoke the musical voice of Angela—that voice to which a more masculine tone was imparted by the metallic sonorousness which it derived from the helmet whence it came.

And as the heroine gave utterance to these words, she stretched one of the armed men senseless at her feet, while De Colmar's weapon cleft another's head in twain, cutting with tremendous force through the steel helmet and the crashing skull.

A shriek burst from the baroness, and then she became suddenly silent and completely motionless, watching with the acutest suspense the progress of the fight, which was now waged upon more equal terms. For at present the combatants were two to two—Sir Ernest de Colmar against the domestic, and Angela against the remaining armed servitor.

But scarcely a minute did the conflict last; for the knight ran the menial through the heart with the good sword, and the armed servitor's weapon suddenly snapping in halves, he surrendered to Angela at discretion.

Then did it happen that although our heroine succeeded in worsting two of the four opponents, yet in neither instance was she fated to take a life; for one of the men whom she vanquished was only stunned, and the latter had declared himself beaten. On the other hand, Sir Ernest de Colmar's two enemies lay dead at his feet!

The instant that the conflict terminated in the overthrow of her myrmidons, the Baroness Hamelen gave vent to her anguish, her terror, and her rage in a long rending scream, and then, totally overpowered by the violence of her excited passions, she fell senseless on the floor.

De Colmar and Angela hastened to bind the arms and legs of the man who had surrendered; and, having thus rendered him powerless, they endeavored to bring back the baroness to consciousness—for the knight's anxiety was now to force from her lips a confession of what had become of his two pages. But although her heart beat and her lips quivered, thus affording unmistakable signs that life was not extinct, yet for want of proper restoratives De Colmar and Angela could not succeed in recovering her.

'Ah! a thought strikes me!' suddenly ejaculated the knight; and hastening to the spot where the man who had surrendered to Angela was lying bound hand and foot, he said, 'You can doubtless give me the information which I seek concerning two gallant youths—'

But at this moment the door was burst open, and five or six more of the sworn servitors of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue rushed into the Gallery of Porcelain Vases; for the clash of arms and the shrieks of the baroness had reached their ears in another part

of the building and had attracted them hither.

'Now, my gallant unknown friend,' exclaimed De Colmar, turning to confront the bravos, and uttering these words hastily, 'we have more work to do, but let us only succeed in cutting our way through these miscreants to the marble hall below, and we shall then be safe.'

For De Colmar remembered his agreement with the young page Ermach.

One glance around was sufficient to show the armed servitors who had just arrived in the gallery that a desperate conflict had taken place; and quickly as that look was thrown upon the scene, did the ruffians commence a furious attack upon De Colmar and Angela.

With each new danger that thus presented itself in such rapid succession, did the forest-maiden's courage rise and her ardor receive additional inspiration; for, to speak soothly, she was combatting by the side of the man whom she loved—and she was well aware that defeat would be followed by death at the hands of such desperados as those to whom she found herself and her companion opposed.

The object of De Colmar was now to sustain a running conflict, so that he and Angela might reach the hall; for the numbers against whom they had a second time to contend were fearfully disproportionate, and there was the chance, amounting almost to a certainty, that their enemies would receive ample reinforcements.

'On, my brave unknown!' ejaculated De Colmar; 'on, with the strength of a thousand!'

Upon the maiden's armor the blows rained like hail; but the valorous Austrian knight not only defended himself—aye, and kept his opponents fully employed—but likewise parried many a thrust levelled at his companion, whom he took for some youthful gallant, little deeming her to be a female and one so well known to him.

Right and left blood was shed in the ranks of the armed servitors, and in a minute two of them lay weltering in their gore. This time Angela's weapon had done fatal work; but her own good steel panoply kept her lovely form unscathed, while De Colmar's exquisite skill saved his own person from harm. And now with a desperate rush did they cut their way through their surviving opponents, and on the threshold of the door the conflict was renewed for a short time. But the bravos were beaten back, just at the moment that the baroness, recalled to consciousness by the din of weapons, began to rend the air once more with her piercing shrieks.

'Back, back, my brave unknown!' exclaimed De Colmar, 'and prepare to shut the portal upon them!'

Obedient to this command, Angela retreated behind him, while he with one tremendous effort stretched another of the foemen at his feet and drove the survivors several paces back into the passage, he left the threshold clear for Angela, who instantaneously closed the door, and the bolt was shot into its socket.

'Thus far have we triumphed!' ejaculated De Colmar, 'and now to the marble hall!'

Along the brilliantly-lighted corridor they sped, with their blood-stained swords in their hands. The passage was clear to them, and on they went without molestation. The door of the apartment in which Angela had made prisoners of the three nobles and the Carthusian was still fastened; and the violent knocking inside showed her that they yet remained captive there.

Down the marble staircase did the maiden and the Austrian warrior speed; but the moment their eyes could command the range of the hall, they perceived that another and perhaps still more desperate struggle was now at hand, for eight armed men, each wearing the ominous black mask, were stationed there!

Then Angela instantly recollected that this must be the party intended for the escort in pursuance of the command given by the Baron of Altendorf; and the looks of amazement which those men threw upon De Colmar and the maiden proved that they had no idea of the bloody scenes which had been enacted in the Gallery of Porcelain Vases. Indeed, the distance between that place and the marble hall was too great to have allowed the screams and the clash of arms to reach their ears.

But when those eight men beheld De Colmar and Angela descending the stairs in so hasty a manner and with the blood-stained swords naked in their hands—when too, they marked the terrible looks of menace and defiance which the Austrian hero threw upon them,—they saw at once that something was wrong and instinctively prepared to receive the knight and his companion as foes.

A glance showed De Colmar that Ermach was in the hall; and a rapid sign which the youth made, convinced him that the boy was staunch and faithful to the compact previously settled between them.

'Who are ye? whither are ye going? and what signifies the blood upon your weapons?' demanded the foremost of the eight armed men, his looks alternating rapidly between the knight and Angela.

'None of those queries do we choose to answer,' said De Colmar, sternly,—'but we are prepared to fight our path through all opposition.'

'Then to the gates, my brave fellows, and guard the way against these suspicious-looking strangers!' exclaimed the man who had previously spoken.

Five of the armed servitors thereupon marched out of the hall and traversed the court-yard, proceeding in the direction of the grand portals of the mansion; while the three who were left behind, posted themselves upon the threshold of the marble hall itself, and, presenting their halberds, thus silently but significantly dared our hero and heroine to advance.

Scarcely was this manœuvre executed, and just as the knight and Angela were about to rush on to the attack, the Carthusian appeared at the head of the staircase, exclaiming, 'Secure them,—capture them, I say,—but slay them not!'

At the same instant Ermach bounded forward, bade the knight follow him, and then disappeared beneath the staircase.

For a moment, and only for a moment, did De Colmar hesitate. It flashed to his mind that the page was about to play him false and lead him into the subterranean, the dangers of which were already too well known to him; and then it struck him that Ermach must be sincere and that the under-ground passage might prove an issue of safety.

Therefore, seizing Angela by the arm, De Colmar pushed her on abruptly before him; and hurrying after her, he closed the low door in the faces of the armed men who had bounded forward to arrest this rapidly-executed movement. On the steps Ermach was standing with a lamp in his hand; and, aided by the light thereof, Sir Ernest shot the huge bolt into its socket.

'Now let us run for our lives,' exclaimed Ermach, 'for everything depends upon our arriving *first* at Hamelen Castle.'

And, with these words, he hastened down the stone steps and led the way rapidly along the subterranean, the knight and Angela following at equal speed.

'The chances are all in our favor,' said the page, after a few moments' silence. 'Father Cyprian and his ruffians will hasten from the White Mansion to the Castle in order to intercept us. But if they take horse, they must pursue a circuitous route on account of the dense woods intervening; and if they go on foot, we have obtained a fair start of them. Once let us reach the Castle, and we are safe!' added the yeuth emphatically.

'How so?' demanded De Colmar.—'Is it left unprotected?'

'It is well nigh empty at this moment,' rejoined Ermach.

They had now reached a massive door, which was speedily opened, and their way was continued along the subterranean.

In a few minutes another door, stretching across the vaulted passage, barred their progress for a moment,—and only for a moment; inasmuch as it was easily opened by the young page who led the way,

A third door at length appeared; they ascended a flight of stone steps, and thence they emerged by a wicket into a marble hall, less spacious than that of the White Mansion, but of the fine old gothic architecture of the feudal ages.

'We are now safe in Hamelen Castle,' said the young page exultingly, as he tossed aside the lamp into the corner of the hall; then leading the way to a court-yard surrounded by massive buildings, flanked with gloomy towers, he observed, 'We must not waste time in repairing to the stables to procure horses. The few minutes lost thereby would just place us in the power of our enemies, supposing that they are indeed on their way from the White Mansion hither.'

'Let us hasten forth, then, from this place,' said De Colmar; for I perceive, alas! that I must for the present abandon all hope of discovering any farther clue to the fate of my poor pages.'

Ermarch now conducted the knight and Angela to the arched gateway of the castle; and the old porter whom they found in charge of the entrance, tremblingly obeyed the command he received to open the massive portal, and unlock

the chain which kept the drawbridge raised. The Austrian warrior, the page, and the maiden then passed out of Hamelen Castle; and they were already commencing the descent of a path sloping towards the main road, when half-a-dozen men suddenly sprang upon them from amidst the trees on the way-side.

Forth from their sheaths gleamed in the moonlight the swords of De Colmar and Angela, and the weapons clashed against those of their assailants. But Ermach, less rapid in his movements, was thrown down, and the Carthusian himself, brandishing a dagger, leapt over the prostrate youth. Another instant, and the long shining blade would have drunk the boy's vital tide; but the eye winks not more speedily nor more abruptly than De Colmar's sword swept hissingly through the air, and Father Cyprian's right arm, from which the sleeve had fallen back, received a ghastly wound.

A terrific yell burst from the lips of the enraged and agonizing priest, as the dagger dropped from his hand, and his arm fell powerless by his side; and at the same moment Ermach sprang to his feet.

The armed men who accompanied the Carthusian now surrounded him to afford their protection against farther injury; and the combat ceasing to be offensive on their part, De Colmar, Angela, and Ermach, retired slowly along the pathway. No additional molestation was offered them; their enemies, although more numerous than they, appeared to have had enough of the conflict, and in a few minutes our hero and heroine, together with the young page, gained the high road in safety.

CHAPTER L.

THE KNIGHT, THE PAGE, AND THE FOREST-MAIDEN.

So rapid had been the succession of events, and so thrillingly exciting were these incidents, from the moment when Angela had appeared upon the threshold of the Gallery of Porcelain Vases until the instant when the party entered the broad and open road, as just stated, that during this interval Sir Ernest de Colmar had scarcely found a moment to express his thanks to his unknown friend, for the important services rendered him throughout those scenes of peril. But now that they appeared to be beyond the reach of danger, the knight paused, saying, 'Let us rest ourselves here a few minutes, for I am most anxious, brave unknown, to become better acquainted with thee.'

These last words were addressed to Angela, but before she had time to reply, the young page exclaimed, 'Most respectfully but emphatically would I suggest that we tarry not here; for although your prowess, fair sirs, has just discomfitted the priest and his companions, yet 'tis more than probable that there be others of the same infernal gang prowling abroad in search of us.'

'Shall we, then, push on towards Prague with all possible haste?' demanded Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Nay, it will not suit my safety to return thither,' observed Angela; 'inasmuch as I borrowed this suit of panoply from the armoury of the castle, and it has served me in a purpose which is not well calculated to recommend me to the good graces of General Zitzka.'

'I see that it is necessary we should hold some converse together,' observed De Colmar; 'and we will therefore enter the adjacent wood for the purpose.'

They accordingly turned from the moon-lit road into the maze of dark verdure which bordered it; and on reaching a small open space amidst the trees they deemed the spot suitable for their conference. There the knight, the page, and Angela accordingly seated themselves upon the dewy grass; and De Colmar resumed the conversation by addressing himself in these terms to our heroine:

'In the first place, gallant unknown, you must permit me to offer you my sincerest, warmest, and most fervent thanks for the good service which you have rendered me this night. To your timely appearance and generous aid am I indebted for my life; and the gratitude I owe you is therefore commensurate with the boon I have received. In the second place, my brave friend, I must inform thee that my name is Ernest de Colmar; and while I live, shall my heart cherish a brother's affection towards thee. Some interest do I possess at the Court of Vienna, and if there be any service which I can render thee in acknowledgment of that aid which thou hast so chivalrously lent me this night, be assured that his sovereign highness the Duke of Austria will listen with attention to any prayer that I may proffer

on thy behalf. And now, in the third place, let me beseech thee to tell me who thou art—aye, and likewise to raise thy vizor, that by the moonlight I may obtain a glimpse of those features which shall henceforth remain graven on my memory as if they were the fondly cherished lineaments of a near and dear relative. For again do I repeat,' added De Colmar, 'that thou hast done me a service which henceforth renders us brothers.'

'Sir Knight,' answered our heroine, after a brief pause, during which she had to overcome and subdue the ineffable emotions of joy and pleasure which his words had excited in her bosom; for that pledge of brotherly affection—oh! it went warm and glowing to the heart of Angela—this maiden who was so dauntless in the hour of danger, and yet so tender and sensitive in all the soft and beneficent feelings of her woman's nature:—'Sir Knight,' she said, 'I receive your thanks as a generous compliment rather than as a meed of praise duly earned by any real and effective service on my part. For although I had the will and the inclination to succor you——'

'By heaven! young gentleman, you marvellously under-rate your own prowess!' interrupted De Colmar. 'Not only had you the will and the inclination to assist me, but you likewise had the courage and the power; for ill would it have fared with me more than once during that half-hour of rapidly succeeding perils and stirring incidents, had it not been for thine aid. Therefore, my dear youth—for that you *are* young, your gentle voice and embarrassed manner alike prove—therefore, was I about to observe, although I much admire modesty and diffidence when seasonably exhibited and properly placed, yet can I never consent to engross the whole of that merit which another can so worthily claim to share. We have beaten our enemies, my dear friend, in three distinct encounters have we beaten them, although they mustered in strong numbers against us; and at least half of any amount of glory attaching to those exploits belongs to thee. But thou hast a far greater claim upon my admiration, gratitude, and friendship:' continued De Colmar solemnly; 'inasmuch as you made your appearance at a moment when I was overpowered and a prisoner—and therefore, I repeat, am I indebted to thee for my life. Who art thou, then, my brave unknown? and how was it that thou didst come thus opportunely to rescue me from my enemies?'

'It were a long tale to tell in all its minuteness,' answered the forest-maiden; 'and therefore must your excellency be contented with the shortest and most meagre outline for the present—at least until we obtain another opportunity to converse upon the subject. Suffice it, then, to say that certain circumstances led me to the White Mansion—that almost immediately after my arrival within its walls I overheard enough to convince me that treachery was intended towards you; and that finding my way to the Gallery of Porcelain Vases, I fortunately arrived in time——'

'To save me from destruction,' added Sir Ernest de Colmar, emphatically.

'Perhaps I may be permitted to mention certain particulars which the modesty of this young gentleman appears determined to keep in the background,' said the youthful page, now joining in the discourse.'

'Speak, Ermach,' cried De Colmar. 'I am all attention, though nothing that you may communicate can possibly enhance the affectionate regard which I already experience towards my gallant deliverer.'

'And yet your excellency's admiration will rise into wonder and amazement,' continued Ermach, 'when I assure you that this gentle youth, who knows not what real danger is, but who shrinks from praise as if it were the most formidable of perils—this gentle youth, I say, has delivered the three noble hostages from the Castle of Prague.'

'What! is it possible?' ejaculated De Colmar. 'The Marquis of Schomberg, the Count of Rosenberg, and the Baron of Altendorf are free!'

'Free, and delivered by the unaided ingenuity of our companion,' responded Ermach, evidently experiencing a generous pleasure in thus proclaiming the achievements of one whose prowess had excited the enthusiastic admiration of his soul. 'Oh! the tidings soon spread through the White Mansion,' continued the boy, speaking in a fervid tone; 'the domestics who took up the refreshments to the three nobles, overheard enough of their lordships' discourse to make them aware that the brave deliverer was none other than the mild-looking, gentle youth in the polished armor——'

'Is this possible?' once more cried De Colmar, turning towards Angela. 'Who art thou, brave youth? and wherefore thus retain the vizor over thy countenance?'

'It were indeed churlish in me to compel your excellency to ask those questions again,' said our heroine.

'But if it give thee annoyance to answer them,' instantaneously observed De Colmar, who perceived a certain hesitation and tremulousness in her voice—'I would endure all the tortures of the most poignant curiosity and suspense, rather than cause you the slightest vexation.'

'Let me, then, as a boon, beseech your excellency to postpone for three days those explanations which you have demanded at my hands!' exclaimed our heroine.

'For three days!' repeated De Colmar. 'I know not how this can be arranged, inasmuch as at sunrise I am bound to take horse on my journey homeward. In a word,' he added, his voice suddenly becoming mournful, and his countenance sombre in the pure moonlight, as his infernal compact rose up in all its details in his memory—'in a word, I am under the necessity of departing from Prague within a few hours—and I am likewise pledged to escort a lady and her attendants to Vienna.'

'A lady—and her attendants?' cried Angela, giving involuntary utterance to an ejaculation which a sudden sentiment of annoyance prompted; for the noblest nature is accessible to the influence of jealousy—but instantaneously perceiving the folly to which she had yielded, she hastened to repair it as well as she could, by observing, 'Pardon the remark which I made, Sir Knight, but I experienced a sudden disappointment from the latter portion of the statement which you made.'

'How so, my young friend?' demanded our hero, every moment becoming more and more interested in his unknown deliverer, around whom the cloud of mystery appeared to increase rather than diminish.

'I meant to say,' returned Angela, 'that when your excellency first declared that you were about to commence your journey homeward in a few hours, it struck me that I would beg as a boon to be permitted to avail myself of your escort. Your excellency is about to return to Vienna, and my road is in the same direction; that is to say, a three days' journey along the great southern road will take me to the immediate vicinity of my destination.

'A three days' journey!' ejaculated Sir Ernest de Colmar, 'then must your home be in the neighborhood of Altendorf Castle——'

'It is so,' responded Angela.

'And wherefore should you not accompany me thus far?' demanded the knight. 'How was it that anything which I said induced you to alter your plan?'

'Because your excellency has promised to afford an escort to some lady and her attendants, answered our heroine, speaking rapidly and with an excitement arising from the very attempt which she made to avoid any manifestation of feeling—'and, therefore,' she continued, 'I perceived at once that it would be inconvenient in the extreme for me to force my humble companionship upon your excellency. For this much may I now reveal concerning myself, that I am but a poor page, bearing a humble name——'

'And that name, whatever it may be, deserves to become the proudest in Christendom!' exclaimed De Colmar, seizing our heroine's gauntletted hand with all the fervor of the most generous friendship. 'My dear brother-in-arms, for such indeed hast thou proved thyself this night,' proceeded Sir Ernest, still retaining that hand in his own—'I do not seek to penetrate into the mystery in which thou hast enshrouded thyself. That thy motives are honorable and just, I do not for an instant doubt; that thou art all that is good and estimable in disposition as well as dauntless and generous in soul, I would stake my existence! Listen, then, while I pledge myself to serve thee with all my influence, surround thee with my fraternal love, and make thee my bosom friend henceforth until the cold grave shall close over me! Whoever thou art, I am from this moment forth thy sworn brother; and be thy name never so humble, I will find the means to exalt it. Thou shalt, therefore, become the companion of my journey; and, instead of stopping midway to seek thine own home, thou shalt remain with me until we reach Vienna; and there, O brave unknown! I pledge myself that thou shalt receive the honor of knighthood from the hand of his Sovereign Highness the Duke of Austria.'

'Oh! how generous, how noble, how

overpoweringly benevolent is your excellency's conduct towards one of the humblest of God's creatures!' exclaimed Angela, now maintaining a more severe struggle than ever against those emotions of an ineffable susceptibility which the knight's words had aroused in her bosom.

'Wherefore will you persist in receiving as a boon and a kindness every word or promise which gratitude and duty prompt me to utter?' demanded Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'The friendship with which you have inspired me has arisen from the deep obligation under which you have placed me; and the fraternal attachment which I proffer you, springs from the conviction that so much valor and disinterested feeling as you have displayed on my behalf must inevitably be associated with every virtuous principle and estimable quality. Now, therefore, you understand my sentiments towards you. Unknown though you be, shrouded in mystery as you are, I look upon you as a friend; and although your features are as yet unseen by me, yet do I love you like a brother. For, oh! I am well convinced that unless you were all that is noble in nature, though humble in name, you would not have succeeded in exciting in my soul this enthusiastic admiration which I experience in respect to your character.'

'A character with which you are totally unacquainted,' said Angela, in a low and tremulous tone.

'But of which I judge by the incidents of this night,' responded De Colmar immediately. 'Unacquainted with your character!' he exclaimed—'Oh! no, no, it is now as well known to me as if we had been friends from our childhood. For look you,—I am a young man, but I have seen much of the world; and my experience has taught me that there are two kinds of valor. There is the courage which fights either for pay or in self-defence, and which is, therefore, of an egotistical character; and this is not your courage, brave youth. But there is courage which pants to perform chivalrous deeds, and which is likewise ever ready to lend its succor to the victim of treachery or oppression; and it was this courage, which belongs only to the loftiest natures, that prompted thee to rescue the three nobles from the power of Zitzka, and to fly to my succor when you heard that foul play was in operation against me. Such magnanimity can only have its being in a mind stored with the rarest gems of virtue and enriched with all the treasures of the moral world; and therefore, though thou art unknown to me by name, unknown to me by features, still do I experience all those secret affinities of kindred natures which prompt me to pledge thee an eternal vow of friendship and love thee as a dear brother.'

'The poor service which I have rendered your excellency neither deserves nor aspires to so rich a reward,' answered Angela, with difficulty subduing her emotions so as to steady her voice and throw into it that masculine intonation which was necessary to sustain the innocent deceit she was practising with regard to her sex.

'Well,—we will not continue to dispute upon the value of your services, good youth,' said De Colmar. 'Low as may be the estimate which your modesty permits you to place upon them, to me they were invaluable; and, in such a light, shall I ever continue to regard them. But how say you with reference to the proposal which I made you ere now? Will you be my companion to Vienna? will you allow me to present you to his Sovereign Highness and demand at his princely hands the reward due to your generosity and your valor?'

'If my presence would not really prove an encumbrance upon your excellency's travelling arrangements,' said Angela, 'I should cheerfully accept an escort until within sight of the towers of Altendorf Castle. For inasmuch as I may incur some danger, should it be in any way suspected that I was instrumental in delivering the three nobles from the Castle——'

'And this panoply which you procured from the armory?' observed the knight, 'is there no danger that it may be recognised? and would it not be better to lay it aside and assume a vesture that may serve as a disguise in case any of Zitzka's agents should fall in with you?'

'I would rather incur that risk and retain my armor,' was the response, delivered in a low and unassuming, but decisive tone.

'Oh! I can comprehend the chivalrous feeling which animates you, my brave young friend,' said De Colmar,—'you are desirous to preserve that brilliant panoply as the trophy of an exploit which will make all Bohemia ring with the intelligence ——I mean the libera-

tion of the three noble hostages! Yes, the feeling is natural on your part; and I repeat that I can understand it well. But, ah! a reminiscence strikes me!' he suddenly exclaimed; and, as the moonlight streamed full upon his handsome countenance, both Ermach and Angela,could perceive, the latter even through the bars of her helmet, that an expression of mingled embarrassment and vexation suddenly sprang up and spread over his features.

'Something has transpired in your excellency's thoughts to interfere with the arrangements suggested,' said Angela, speaking with a calm dignity, which had in it nothing of either remonstrance or anger. 'I regret that I should have even alluded to the project of accompanying your excellency.'

'Heavens! let me not be misunderstood,' exclaimed De Colmar. 'Our plan relative to the travelling together was so far settled that you promised to favor me with your society at least unto the vicinage of Altendorf Castle.—Leaving then, to another opportunity, the pleasing endeavor to persuade you to accompany me all the way to Vienna,—I must now remind you that we were speaking of the bright armor which becomes you so admirably.'

'True!' ejaculated Angela, relieved from the idea that it was her companionship in the projected journey which had suddenly assumed an embarrassing aspect to the knight's views.

'And you intimated your desire to retain the panoply,' continued Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'But,—oh! deem not that any idle vanity on my part prompts the wish,' exclaimed the forest-maiden, who really resolved to keep the armor as a disguise and not as a trophy.

'I think that I have already comprehended and explained the feeling which influences you, my brave young friend,' said De Colmar. 'And now I must tell you the objection which suddenly rose up in my mind——'

'An objection?' repeated Angela, wondering what it could possibly be.

'Yes, an objection,' resumed the knight, 'and one which will convince you that it will at least be necessary for you to lay aside the armor and have it packed for conveyance along with such baggage as may be taken by myself and the lady whom I am to escort to Vienna.'

'And this objection?' said Angela, in a tone of somewhat impatient inquiry.

'One word will explain it,' responded Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'The lady who is to accompany me has been dwelling for the last few days in the Castle of Prague; she may therefore have visited the armory, and, if this be the case, she might have marked the particular suit of armor which you have since taken thence, and which constitutes the trophy of your grand exploit. Suppose, then, that she was to recognise this panoply——'

'But who is the lady that you have spoken of?' asked Angela, nerving herself with all her courage to receive that answer of the nature of which she was already forewarned by a presentiment; then, instantly perceiving that her question must have the appearance of being dictated by an impertinent curiosity, she said, 'For methought that only those ladies who belong to the Taborite sect could possibly find admission to a fortress which has become the head-quarters of General Zitzka.'

'And you are therefore surprised that I should undertake to escort a Taborite lady to Vienna?' said De Colmar, laughing; but instantly remembering the compact by virtue of which he was under the necessity of conducting Gloria to the Austrian capital, his countenance resumed a sombre aspect with a suddenness that failed not to strike the forest-maiden. 'It nevertheless is a fact,' he continued, in a voice the gloom of which corresponded with the cloud upon his features, 'that I am bound to escort a Taborite lady to Vienna. And this lady, with her two attendants, will meet me soon after sunrise, at the southern gate of the city; you therefore perceive that time is wearing on and becoming precious, for it must be now half-past one o'clock——'

'At least,' observed Ermach.

'But the lady? said the forest-maiden, anxious to have the last shadow of uncertainty dissipated; for the mention of the *two attendants* had elevated almost to a conviction the suspicion which she had previously entertained.

'The lady to whom I allude,' said De Colmar, 'bears the romantic but beautiful name of Gloria.'

'I have heard of her,' remarked the forest-maiden, in a low tone and after a few moments pause. 'But rumor declares that beauteous lady to be of a generous disposition and a noble nature, and I shall not therefore lay aside mine armor on her account. Unless, indeed,' added our heroine hastily, as a sudden

thought struck her, 'your excellency should apprehend that my presence in this panoply may entail danger upon yourself by rendering you an object of suspicion to the Taborites, leading them to imagine, perhaps, that you were an accomplice in the deliverance of the three noble prisoners——'

'No danger of that kind do I dread,' interrupted De Colmar; 'and even if there were any chance of such a peril arising, I should not use it as an argument to induce you to lay aside that armor for which you entertain, as it were, an affection, and in which you have already distinguished yourself so nobly. No, my dear young friend,' exclaimed the knight, rising from the green sward, 'I am neither so selfish nor so pusillanimous as to think of myself in this matter. It was on your own account and solely in reference to yourself, that I spoke; for although I am well aware that you recoil not from peril, still there is a prudence which prompts even the most valorous to adopt certain precautions when danger threatens, or at all events to avoid rushing on to meet that danger half-way. On the other hand, I am rejoiced to recognise in you, brave youth, a steadiness of purpose and a strength of resolution which constitute even a stronger panoply than the bright armor which you prize so highly and become so nobly Keep, then, thy chivilrous equipment, my gallant young friend, and should it please thee to accompany me all the way to Vienna, instead of stopping short to return to thy own home, I can fairly promise that never will the hand of the Duke of Austria have bestowed the honor of knighthood upon a worthier candidate than thou.'

'Again and again must I thank your excellency for all your generous sentiments concerning me,' said Angela.—'But I once more assure you that so soon as we shall arrive within sight of the towers of Altendorf Castle, must I say farewell. This will be on the third day hence—and *then*, Sir Knight, shall I tell you who I am, and wherefore I have so obstinately persisted in keeping the vizor over my countenance.'

'Be it as you will, brave youth,' exclaimed De Colmar. 'And now must I hasten towards Prague, for time is wearing on——'

'Into the city I shall not accompany your excellency,' said Angela; 'for to appear in the midst of the Taborite garrison, clad in this armor, were indeed a piece of hair-brained folly of which I am not altogether capable, rash and headstrong as I may have already appeared. But soon after sunrise, Sir Knight, I shall join you in the immediate vicinage of the southern gate of Prague.'

'And right glad shall I be to welcome you again,' answered De Colmar, once more taking the maiden's gauntletted hand shaking it with all the cordiality of an affectionate friendship. 'But is there naught that I can do to serve thee in Prague, my gallant friend, during the hour or two that will intervene ere the commencement of the journey?—Hast thou no message to send to relatives or friends? are all thy preparations for travelling completed? and hast thou a horse——'

'Ah! in this respect may your excellency serve me,' exclaimed Angela, who had intended to speak to De Colmar upon a point which would otherwise menace her with some degree of embarrassment. 'I have a fleet and trusty steed in Prague, it is true—but inasmuch as prudence forbids me to enter the city, and other circumstances prevent me from sending to claim the animal——'

'Be not uneasy upon that score,' interrupted De Colmar. 'I will undertake to mount you, brave boy, as well as if you had your own good steed, whereof you are speaking. And now farewell until we meet again according to the appointment already arranged.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela accordingly separated; and while the latter remained in the wood, the former struck once again into the high road, followed by the youthful page Ermach.

CHAPTER LI.

THE MEETING AT THE SOUTHERN GATE.

It was the hour of sunrise, and from amidst the rapidly dispersing vapors of the early morn the towers, and churches, and countless buildings of the Bohemian capital stood forth to catch the orient beams which gladdened the new-born day.

The solemn silence of that hour when nature thus awoke to life and light again, was soon broken by the busy hum of the insect world, and by the delicious melody of the groves, ere the sounds of human voices vibrated through

the crisp fresh air; and the droning of the bee, the shrill carol of the lark, the whirr of the wood pigeon's wings in the grove, the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep in the pastures—all these familiar sounds greeted the glory of the nascent day.

And then to thee, O Lord of Hosts! ascended the incense of grateful worship from the shrines of thine own temples; and the chaunt of the matin choristers sent up to thy throne the pœan of rejoicing and the hymn of thanksgiving for the presence of that glorious sun which lightened the earth's darkness again!

And it was while the earliest beams of that rising orb were glinting above the blue mountains in the far-off east, and stealing like threads of pensile lustre through the grey mists which began to flee before the presence of the dawn—it was at this soft and witching hour that a party of four persons rode slowly forth from the southern gate of the Bohemian capital.

The foremost horseman was Sir Ernest de Colmar, attired in that plain and simple travelling garb in which we first introduced him to our readers; and it was only by the golden spurs upon the heels of his boots, that his rank of knighthood was proclaimed.

Following close behind him was Ermach, mounted on the steed which belonged to Lionel, and leading by the bridle the one that Konrad was wont to bestride. This latter horse was ready caparisoned, and was intended for the use of Angela.

At a short distance in the rear of Ermach, two grooms were mounted on sumpter-horses, one carrying behind the knight's armor carefully packed; and the other the valise containing the necessaries of his toilette.

We should observe that these two grooms had followed Sir Ernest de Colmar at a couple of days' journey distance on the occasion when we found him travelling towards Prague in the opening chapter of our tale.

On passing forth from the southern portals of the Bohemian capital, the knight reined in his steed—an example which was immediately followed by Ermach and the grooms in respect to their animals; and the party halted thus for a few minutes until the sounds of horses' hoofs upon the inner drawbridge reached their ears. Then, in another moment the graceful cavalcade of a lady and her two dependents, all mounted on prancing palfreys elegantly caparisoned, emerged from the outer gates of the fortifications.

Although Gloria was veiled, yet De Colmar immediately knew that it was she, not only by a single glance sweeping the admirable symmetry of her form which in its own rich beauties had no parallel save that of Satanais, but likewise because he instantaneously recognised the sweet countenances of her handmaidens, Linda and Beatrice.

Spurring his horse towards the lady, he doffed his plumed cap in courteous salutation; but the eagle glance of Gloria immediately detected a certain gloom upon his features and a restraint in his manner, both of which he endeavored to subdue. But even the very effort which he thus made for the generous purpose of concealing from her the fact that he deplored the necessity of becoming her guardian and escort to the Austrian capital—even this attempt which he struggled so hard to accomplish, rather than wound her feelings by the faintest appearance of annoyance or vexation at her companionship—even this very endeavor, which his natural goodness of heart prompted, was observed and understood in an instant by that being who loved him with such indescribable fervor!

But not choosing, at the very outset of the journey, to make him aware that she had even noticed the feeling which she had nevertheless so quickly and so profoundly read—and moreover cheering herself with the fond hope that she possessed in her sovereign beauty and her winning eloquence all the means necessary to dazzle the imagination, captivate the heart, and enchant the soul of the Austrian warrior, Gloria threw back her veil in acknowledgment of his graceful salutation, and thus suddenly opened upon him that formidable battery of charms which were so well calculated to touch a spirit that the shock of armies could not move, nor the roar of battle shake.

And radiant indeed was the Daughter of Glory in all the translucent loveliness, the romantic splendor, the supernal brilliancy of that beauty with which she was endowed. Parted above the brow of spotless white, was that golden hair which covered her head with its smooth, velvet, glossy sheen, and flowed thence in such lustrous masses and such glowing undulations over shoulders stainless as milk, yet flesh-tinted as when alabaster reflects

the roseate lustre of crimson curtains in a gorgeously lighted saloon. And hen those eyes—those marvellous, those wonderful eyes—dark as the blackest velvet, yet lustrous as if all the power of the sun shone therein—luminous as when a church is lighted at midnight with a thousand tapers, yet unfathomable as the depths of the ocean! And the lips—Oh! those rich, moist, scarlet lips, opening above the pearly teeth like a luscious fruit revealing its dazzling seeds within: if it were with such smiles that Eve beguiled Adam when she herself had succumbed to the temptations of Satan, small marvel is there that he fell!

The elegant palfrey which Gloria rode was itself all symmetry and grace, with its curvettings half playful and half proud, and its superbly arching neck; and Gloria's seat was of elegant firmness, showing at a glance that she was alike a bold and graceful equestrian. Her form, so richly rounded in all its contours, and yet so exquisite in its proportions, yielded as it were to the motion of the palfrey—or rather took a wavy, undulating movement corresponding therewith, and resembling the soft vibration of a silken cord when gently shaken. And the position of the radiant equestrian exhibited all the sweeping, flowing outlines of her shape to the best advantage—throwing out the luxuriant contours into fine relief with the rest—imparting to the bust a more voluptuous fulness, and to the waist a more delicate symmetry.

She was attired in a riding dress of crimson velvet, the skirt of which just suffered the long, slight, exquisitely shaped feet to peer forth in their polished prunella shoes. The corsage of the dress was open in front; but the bosom was covered with the richest black lace, which, though doubled in its folds, was still unable to prevent the dazzling whiteness of the skin from shining through this too diaphanous texture.

In a word, Gloria was indeed radiant this morn—transcendant in all her wondrous charms this day—so supernally, so overpoweringly beautiful, that no language has fitting terms to convey the complete idea of this magic combination of attractions—this perfect realization of all the romance of female fascination.

When, therefore, she raised her veil and turned her beaming countenance upon Sir Ernest de Colmar—and when her eyes suddenly met his own like lamps of Rosacrucian brilliancy which some mystic curtain reveals all in a moment—those eyes that appeared to pour a flood of ineffable light and glowing warmth into his very soul—he felt dazzled, bewildered, overcome—as on the occasion when he first beheld her in the church, or when he met her on the southern rampart of Prague.

But this sensation, bearing such triumphant testimony to the power of Gloria's beauty, almost instantaneously passed away; for it suddenly seemed to De Colmar that the hand which the lady extended towards him was stained with a drop of blood. Yes, though spotless in sooth was that pure and polished flesh, yet in ideality did it appear marked with the indelible stigma of human gore; for, fresh to our hero's memory, as it were still enacting before his eyes, came back that scene in the grove where the old woman lay murdered at the feet of the radiant beauty!

Thus it was almost with a sentiment of disgust that De Colmar felt himself suddenly inspired; and something seemed to revolt, recoil, start back, as it were, within him, as in obedience to knightly courtesy, and also for the purpose of concealing his emotion, he bent his head low and touched with his lips the slight, warm, fair hand of the Daughter of Glory.

She perceived a change pass suddenly over his countenance—she saw that the dazzling effect of her beauty was in a moment succeeded and altogether counteracted by some feeling which sprang up within the knight's breast—she even penetrated the embarrassment of his manner as he kissed her hand, and for an instant her bosom heaved, and her cheeks crimsoned, and her blood tingled with indignation. But in another moment—quick as one thought can possibly succeed another—she recovered all her presence of mind, and by a powerful effort subdued all her insurgent feelings, as she repeated within the depths of her own soul that strange and exulting ejaculation to which she had given vent in the grove on the morning of Dame Martha's murder—'*He is mine! he is mine!*'

CHAPTER LII.

A CONVERSATION ON A THRILLING TOPIC.

In the preceding chapter we have narrated the meeting of Gloria and Sir Ernest de Colmar at the southern gate of Prague; and we have likewise endeavored to afford the reader an idea of those feelings which the knight experienced when thus again exposed to the witching influence of the lady's superhuman beauty. But we did not choose to interrupt our narrative in order to notice the fact which Gloria's presence produced upon the youthful page Ermach. We must, therefore, now observe that when the radiant being threw back her veil and thus made all the sun-lit glory of her charms burst upon the dazzled eyes of Sir Ernest de Colmar, at that moment Ermach, who had reined in his steed beneath the shade of a wide-spreading oak on the way-side, gave utterance to an ejaculation of amazement as he caught sight of the resplendent countenance of Gloria.

But this expression of wonderment on his part escaped the ears of the rest, for the knight had spurred his steed towards the lady as she issued from the outer gate,—and the two grooms had halted with their sumpter-horses at a little distance. Thus the surprise of Ermach at thus beholding Gloria, passed unnoticed; but from beneath the deep shade of that friendly oak did he contemplate the beauteous creature with a strange and profoundly earnest attention, as she extended her hand to the Austrian knight, whose feelings as he touched it with his lips we have already described.

The cavalcade now arranged itself in travelling order. Sir Ernest de Colmar and Gloria went first, the knight riding on the lady's left hand, according to custom; then came Linda and Beatrice, between whom the young page Ermach placed himself with a due observance of courtesy; and the two grooms brought up the rear.

But we must observe that while these arrangements were making, or rather, while all the members of the party thus fell into their proper places in the procession, Gloria did not happen to take any notice of Ermach; therefore whether she would recognise him on any future occasion when she could not help observing him, was a matter of doubt to the young page, defying all conjecture as to the issue.

There was another circumstance which we must mention in connection with this meeting at the southern gate of the city of Prague; namely, the mingled surprise and vexation which Linda and Beatrice experienced when the timid and furtive glances which they threw upon the knight's attendants, encountered not Lionel and Konrad. Then the looks which the two sisters rapidly exchanged, showed each other that they were both seized with the same sentiment of disappointment mingled with wonder at the absence of the two youths whom they had expected to become their travelling companions. But hastily composing their countenances in order to conceal their emotions from Ermach, as he took his place between them, they awaited in painful suspense until some opportunity should reveal to them the reason why Lionel and Konrad were no longer in attendance upon Sir Ernest de Colmar.

The cavalcade now moved on in the order already described; but its pace was slow, because the knight was fearful of missing his youthful deliverer who had promised to join him at the southern gate soon after sun-rise. He accordingly mentioned to Gloria that he expected an immediate addition to their party; and this remark opened the conversation between the knight and his lovely companion.

'Any friend of your excellency will be most welcome to me,' said Gloria, concealing with a powerful effort the vexation that she in reality experienced at the intelligence on which she thus commented with so much duplicity, for she had entertained the hope of having the society of De Colmar all to herself during the journey from Prague to Vienna. 'And may I inquire the name and rank of the companion whom you are thus expecting?' she asked, with all the rich harmony of her golden voice.

'In good sooth, beauteous lady,' responded De Colmar, 'I am unable to answer that question. The fact is that the past night has been one pregnant with incidents of a startling and romantic character; and not for a single moment have my eyes been closed in slumber. Privation of rest is however a matter of small importance to one who has seen so many rough campaigns, and been engaged in so many hard-fought battles, during the Turkish wars ——'

'In which your excellency distinguished yourself so highly,' added Gloria, casting upon him a look full of ineffable affection mingled with ardent admiration.

'And from whose flattering lips, lady, have you heard my praises?' inquired De Colmar, fixing upon her a searching glance, as if to ascertain whether she were acquainted with something more concerning him than she choose to appear to know.

'The Captain-General has told me of your skill as a leader, your bravery as a warrior, and your generosity as a conqueror,' answered Gloria.

The noble-hearted Zitzka has spoken of me in flattering terms,' said De Colmar. 'But is that all that he hath said to you concerning me?'

'Not all, most assuredly,' exclaimed Gloria, with a winning smile, 'inasmuch as he has spoken frequently and at great length in your praise. But the whole purport and bearing of his comments may be summed up in the manner I have already explained.'

'Ah! then! Zitzka has kept my secret,' said De Colmar to himself; and, after a short pause, he turned again towards Gloria, observing, 'I was telling you, beauteous lady. a few moments ago, that the past night has been one of strange and manifold adventures with regard to myself. Deep treachery enmeshed me in its toils—perils threatened me on all sides—and there were moments when my life was not worth a purchase even at the smallest coin.'

'Is it possible!' exclaimed Gloria, her large black eyes losing for nearly a minute the intensity of their brightness as that splendor became subdued into the melting tenderness of the touching interest with which she now surveyed the Austrian knight.

'My position was as dangerous as I have intimated,' he replied, 'and it were impossible to exaggerate the peri whence I was most unexpectedly delivered by the brave youth who will presently join us. But he appears to be a singular and mysterious being; and I therefore deem it necessary to inform you, fair lady, beforehand, that he has cogent reasons of his own for keeping his name and personal identity alike secret.'

'His personal identity!' exclaimed Gloria, scarcely comprehending the meaning of the phrase in the sense in which De Colmar used it.

'Yes, his personal identity,' repeated the knight; 'or in plainer terms, he is unwilling to disclose who he really is, and therefore does he keep the vizor of his helmet closed over his countenance. For he is attired in a complete suit of armor, which gives to his slight form all the martial elegance and warrior-like grace of an Amazon.'

'I am now anxious indeed for the arrival of this gallant unknown, who was enabled to render your excellency such signal service,' said Gloria. 'But you have not yet told me the nature of the perils which environed you, and the bare allusion to which has already made me shudder—on your account,' she added, in a low and touching tone, and with a look of fervent passion.

'It would be a long tale to tell now, beauteous lady,' said De Colmar; 'and besides, I am fearful that my adventures of the past night were in some measure connected with a terrible mystery, the mere mention of whose name would make you shudder, I know full well, from head to foot.'

'Ah!' ejaculated Gloria, the color suddenly leaving her cheeks, as if it were the cold palor attendant upon a dread presentiment. 'But that mystery—that name——'

'The Bronze Statue!' responded De Colmar, bending forward from his horse in such a manner that the terrible words should only fall whisperingly upon the ears of the Daughter of Glory.

'O God!' she murmured, as this realization of her presentiment struck her as if with the sudden blow of a weapon; 'what danger have you incurred, Ernest, and what know you of the Bronze Statue?'

'I will tell you, Gloria,' replied the warrior, in whose mind had suddenly sprung up the thought that his beauteous companion must know the secret of the Bronze Statue, whatever it were, and that she might now perhaps be induced to make a confidant of him.—'Last night I found myself in a place which I can only look upon as the headquarters of the miscreants connected with some secret tribunal of fearful, portent, and appalling attributes.'

'And that place?' demanded Gloria, in a rapid and wildly excited tone, as her eyes swept the scene around with that shuddering furtiveness, which showed that she dreaded to encounter some object which she nevertheless knew her looks must inevitably meet somewhere in the direction whither they were turned.

'Behold the place!' said De Colmar, pointing towards the White Mansion, which gleamed at a distance amidst the verdure that embowered it on the gentle eminence where it stood.

'Ah! you have been—*there?*' murmured the Daughter of Glory, in a faint and stifling tone; and averting her head from the knight, she rode on for a few minutes in profound silence.

'I should not have alluded to the terrible mystery of the Bronze Statue,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, at length feeling this pause to be growing awkward and embarrassing, 'had not I deemed it probable that you were able to gratify the fearful curiosity which I naturally experience concerning it.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Gloria, now mechanically, and indeed quite involuntarily, turning towards De Colmar a counte nance which was as pale as death, and on every lineament of which an awful terror was depicted.

'Wherefore should your excellency imagine that I possess the key to the mystery?' she demanded, but evidently with a tremendous effort to keep down the emotions that thus became almost suffocating, because unable to find a vent through the natural issue of agonising ejaculations.

'Pardon me—oh! pardon me, dear lady,' exclaimed De Colmar, now deeply compassionating the anguished condition of mind into which his words had thrown the Daughter of Glory; and reproaching himself even with the charge of cruelty in having thus tortured her, he again cried, 'Pardon me—pardon me!'

'It is impossible that I can be angry with *you*,' Ernest,' said the lovely creature, in the lowest, deepest, and most moving tones of her rich metallic voice; while at the same time her eyes looked in unto the depths of his own with all the fervor of that devouring passion which she cherished towards him.—'But tell me, Ernest—tell me wherefore you imagined that I was able to solve for you the enigma involved in those words——'

And suddenly she stopped short, as her lips refused to give utterance to the name of the Bronze Statue.

'Since you ask me thus earnestly, I will respond frankly,' said the knight. 'The incidents which occurred in the church some weeks ago, when that awful doom was menaced——'

'Yes, yes—menaced against *me*,' exclaimed Gloria, her eyes glancing towards the White Mansion, and then reverting with mingled terror and tenderness to De Colmar.

'Likewise,' he continued, seeing that she wished him to proceed, despite of the agitation which the topic caused her to experience,—'likewise the discourse which Angela Wildon overheard between Father Cyprian and Dame Martha at the inn,—that discourse with which I made you acquainted through the agency of General Zitzka, and which Angela herself has doubtless narrated to you in all its details.'

'Yes, that conversation and the menaces it implied, were duly communicated to me,' said the Daughter of Glory; 'and now I begin to understand that because I have been thus threatened more than once with the doom of the Bronze Statue,' she added, nerving herself with a desperate courage to give utterance to the name; 'you fancy that I thoroughly comprehend the nature of that terrific fate, and can explain it to you? And you are right, Ernest—you are right,' she added, in a low and solemn tone, while she struggled with all her force and all her energy, alike of mind and body, to subdue the writhings which threatened to rend the former and convulse the latter. 'Yes, I *do* know the meaning, the significancy, and the hideous barbarism of the Virgin's Kiss; but, my God! ask me not to reveal aught of all that tremendous accumulation of mysteries—seek not to persuade me to draw aside the veil which covers those unimaginable horrors!—Besides,' she added, another startling reminiscence flashing through her brain—'there is my oath—my oath—and *that* I dare not break! Oh! no, no—God forbid that I should break my oath!'

And, apparently forgetful that she was in a public road, and that De Colmar's eyes were fixed intently upon her, the Daughter of Glory clasped her hands fervently, as if with an impulse of secret supplication to be strengthened in her resolution to keep some oath of tremendous import, which she had taken.

The knight gazed upon her with an indescribable amazement and an uncontrollable curiosity; for he felt that there was some awful mystery connected with this being of transcendent beauty; and he longed to pursue the conversation on the same thrilling topic as hitherto, in the hope that she would be at length induced to give him her full confidence. But at the very moment when the Daughter of Glory regained her self-

possession, and was about to make some fresh observation to Sir Ernest de Colmar, a rustling amidst the adjacent trees attracted their notice ; and Angela Wildon, in her polished suit of complete armor, issued from the grove bordering the highway.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FIRST OF THE JOURNEY.

'WELCOME, my brave deliverer!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, concealing beneath the enthusiasm of his tone and manner the alarm which he in reality experienced lest Gloria should perchance recognise that panoply which now shone so brilliantly in the beams of the morning sun.

And the same dread was uppermost in the bosom of Angela, as through her barred vizor she flung a rapid and searching glance upon the countenance of the Daughter of Glory, to mark the effect which her sudden appearance in that lustrous armor would produce upon her.

But, to the indescribable satisfaction of both Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela Wildon, the radiant creature manifested no feeling, and her countenance underwent no change which could possibly induce them to suppose that she had recognised the armor, or indeed had ever seen it before ; and as Angela bowed her plumed head low to the lady, she acknowledged with a gracious salutation and a smile of winning sweetness that compliment from one whom she took to be a youthful warrior and little suspected to be a woman, much less that very Angela to whom she had shown such kind hospitality.

'This is the brave youth,' said De Colmar, 'to whom I am so much indebted for his generous aid during the perilous adventures of the past night, and who is to become our travelling-companion.'

'Such an addition to our party is most welcome,' observed the Daughter of Glory, forcing herself to assume as affable a demeanor as possible. 'But this brave stranger is unprovided with a horse—'

'Not so, lady,' said De Colmar. 'My page is leading the steed intended for the service of our unknown friend.'

At this moment Ermach and the two damsels overtook the knight and the lady at the spot where they had suddenly halted on the appearance of Angela Wildon from the grove; and as De Colmar alluded to his page and the led horse, Gloria mechanically looked round towards the group of dependants.

Then, for the first time during the half hour which had now elapsed since the meeting outside of Prague, did the Daughter of Glory notice Ermach, and the moment her eye fell upon his countenance, she startled as if a sudden thrill went through her entire form. Then she cast a second and more lingering look upon the page; and by the significant glance which he threw back upon her, she saw that her suspicion was confirmed, and that he was the person for whom she had taken him the moment her eyes fell upon him.

But this mutual intelligence which passed so quickly between them, this recognition of Ermach on Gloria's part, and this conviction that she was so recognised on the part of the young page, remained unnoticed by any one besides; for De Colmar was at the moment directing Angela's attention to the steed which had been prepared for her, and Gloria's two damsels were regarding the graceful *unknown* in the bright armor, and with the closed vizor. As for the two grooms, they were riding at some distance in the rear.

Thus no one of the party perceived that recognition between Gloria and Ermach, and ere the former turned her head away again, she made a rapid but significant sign to the effect that she would presently find an opportunity of speaking apart with the young page.

Meantime Angela mounted the good steed which the lost Konrad was wont to bestride ; and taking her place on Gloria's right hand, she fully bore out as an equestrian the chivalrous character which she had assumed.

The cavalcade now moved on once more; but De Colmar observed that Gloria was pensive and even sorrowful, despite of her efforts to assume that gaiety of disposition, and that species of abandonment of manner which were really natural to her. But he attributed her thoughtfulness and her melancholy to the impression which their recent conversation might have made upon her mind; and he was about to make some remark in order to engender a discourse of a more lively nature, when the Daughter of Glory herself originated a new topic.

'You just now mentioned the name

of Angela Wildon, Sir Knight,' she said, 'and I am thereby reminded to ask whether you saw that excellent and amiable young woman ere your departure from Prague, for I presume that you are aware she took leave of me last evening?'

'I regret,—deeply regret that I did not see her,' answered Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'But I learnt this morning from Messer Templin of the Golden Falcon, that Angela had called at the inn last evening and had expressed her desire to see me. She, however, remained not at the hostel; and the worthy landlord delivered to me a kind message of thanks with which she had entrusted him. I regret that I did not see her, I repeat, inasmuch as I fear that she must need good counsel——'

'The same thought struck me,' observed Gloria. 'Indeed, ere I suffered her to depart from the Castle of Prague last evening, I besought her to accept at least the succor of my purse, if not of any other species of assistance; but she assured me that she was well fortified with good advice and amply provided with gold.'

'I thank you, Gloria, most sincerely thank you, for your kindness towards Angela Wildon,' said the knight, with a degree of warmth which made the Daughter of Glory fix her eyes in a searching manner upon his countenance. 'Never can I forget,' he continued, in the same impassioned tone, 'the generous manner in which she ministered unto me when she found me lying senseless upon the heath——'

'You forget,' Sir Knight, interrupted Gloria, 'that all the world is not acquainted with your adventure upon that heath;' and a gloom was spread upon the lady's countenance,—that countenance naturally so radiant, as she gave utterance to these words.

'Ah! pardon me, Gloria,—pardon me,' exclaimed De Colmar, speaking aside to the radiant being. 'Not for worlds would I betray any secret connected with your sister! And this observation reminds me that I should ask whether you have received any tidings of Satanais since she took her departure from Prague seven days ago?'

'I have received no intelligence from her, Ernest,' responded the Daughter of Glory, in a low tone, and with her large lustrous eyes fixed upon the warrior's countenance as if to read, by that index of the soul, all the emotions that were agitating in his mind and all the thoughts that were passing in his brain, as the image of Satanais was thus conjured up to his mental view.

De Colmar noticed not, however, this deep and searching scrutiny of which he was the object; but as he rode pensively onward, a profound sigh escaped from his breast.

'The image of Satanais dwells ever in your memory, Sir Knight,' said Gloria, in a low and deep tone, inaudible to Angela Wildon.

'I have prayed fervently to heaven that happiness and prosperity may attend upon her,' responded De Colmar, not intentionally evading the question put to him, but returning the answer which his emotions suggested at the instant.

A silence of some minutes then ensued.

In the meantime Angela Wildon had experienced a variety of sensations on hearing herself made the subject of conversation between Sir Ernest de Colmar and the Daughter of Glory,—and her heart was filled with feelings of ineffable delight as the words which he spoke in her favor fell upon her ears. A species of happiness till then unknown, and excelling every earthly joy that had hitherto come within the experience of the gentle maiden, gradually suffused itself through her entire being; and her whole existence appeared suddenly to receive a new impulse and take as it were a new coloring therefrom.

There are two incidents in the life of Woman, which are characterised by an importance and an intensity of interest which no human language can describe. One is the occurrence of that moment when for the first time the conviction springs up in her soul that she loves; the other is the occasion when, either as a wife or as the victim of an illicit love, she experiences that mysterious prompting which tells her that she bears in her bosom the fruit of her honorable passion or of her unblest amor.

Yes, these are the two most prominent mile-stones which appear in the track of Woman's memory during her passage through life; and the former of these incidents had just occurred to Angela Wildon!

In De Colmar she had previously recognised her ideal of all that was noble, great, good, and estimable in man, for while in the Castle of Prague she had come to the conclusion that in *his* cha-

racter all those fine qualities were united. And now, therefore—*now* did she enter upon the second and most important phase in the progress of love's growth,—and she felt that the man whom she already looked upon as faultless, had become dearer to her heart than perhaps would prove consistent with her happiness.

And now she comprehended the feeling which had piqued her for a moment when, in the grove, immediately after the escape from the White Mansion and Hamelen Castle, Sir Ernest de Colmar had first told her that he was pledged to conduct a certain lady and her attendants to Vienna; and now also she experienced that emotion of jealousy again, when she beheld the knight and Gloria conversing aside, and in a tone inaudible to herself.

Through the bars of her vizor did her glances travel quickly from the countenance of the Daughter of Glory to that of De Colmar, and thence back again to the radiant features of the former—and the natural quickness of woman's perception enabled her to read the secret of Gloria's love. For when a maiden is herself a prey to the tender passion, her intelligence becomes inspired with a marvellous keenness to discover the same sentiment in others; and thus was it that scarcely had Angela's mental eyes been open to the truth—the important but at first pleasing truth—that her heart was no longer her own, when she was startled by the conviction that Gloria's affections were devoted to the same object!

But was this passion on the part of the Daughter of Glory reciprocated by Sir Ernest de Colmar? For a moment—a moment which seemed a perfect age, so full of whirling, conflicting, varied feelings was it—Angela Wildon fancied that Gloria was indeed beloved in return; and the thought flashed to her soul that she would devise an excuse as speedily as possible to separate herself from a party to which her presence could only be a cause of embarrassment and restraint. But scarcely had this idea sprung up in her brain, when she suddenly received a new and far different impression relative to the feelings wherewith De Colmar regarded the Daughter of Glory, for whereas the radiant being fixed her eyes, so brimful of passion and so overflowing with a love as jealous as it was intense, upon the countenance of the knight, nevertheless *he* gave not back that fervent look, but he grew pensive and a deep sigh escaped his heart!

All these little circumstances,—of a nature so trivial to an indifferent observer, but endowed with so vast and eloquent an interest for the heart that loves,—were duly observed by Angela Wildon; and inasmuch as Love is a teacher which enables the soul to acquire a larger experience in a single moment than it could possibly gain in a whole year through the medium of any other passion or sentiment,—so it was that Angela was suddenly led to make important deductions from circumstances that a few days, or even a few hours before would have been entirely overlooked, or else regarded as the veriest trifles.

That Gloria loved De Colmar,—and that she was jealous, even to be vexed at the encomiastic language to which he had given utterance respecting Angela herself, but that the knight reciprocated not the passion of the Daughter of Glory, these were convictions which had now taken a firm root in the mind of the forest-maiden. But then came the questions—wherefore was De Colmar pensive? wherefore did he sigh so profoundly? did he love, although it was not Gloria?

And unable even to conjecture a response to these queries, inasmuch as she was totally ignorant of everything that regarded the knight and Satanais, save that there was such a being as the latter,—Angela sighed also as she rode along the road on the right hand of the Daughter of Glory. But although her bosom heaved to that deep respiration, yet the steel cuirass undulated not,—and the murmuring of the sigh was drowned in the depths of the helmet with its barred aventayle. Thus the emotion of the charming forest-maiden passed unobserved alike by the Daughter of Glory and Sir Ernest de Colmar, both of whom were very far from suspecting who it really was that thus studiously maintained so rigid a secrecy in reference to person and to name!

Along the wide and even road the cavalcade proceeded; Hamelen Castle was left far behind, and through the adjacent meadows the Moldau was seen to wind its silver way.

The long silence which had been observed by the foremost of the procession at length grew awkward and embarrassing; and Sir Ernest de Colmar, suddenly arousing himself from a deep reverie, turned towards Gloria, saying,

'I hope that General Zitzka took it not amiss that I paid not my respects personally to him ere I quitted Prague?'

'The Captain-General entertains too high an opinion of your excellency, to judge you harshly under any circumstances,' responded Gloria. 'And to speak soothly,' she continued, 'he was fully occupied this morning in endeavoring to fathom an extraordinary occurrence which took place last night, and a rumor of which doubtless reached your excellency ere you took your departure from the Golden Falcon?'

'Ah! you allude to the disappearance of the three State Prisoners!' exclaimed De Colmar. 'Doubtless the general was much vexed at the incident?'

'More than vexed, Sir Knight,—far more than vexed,' observed Gloria, in a solemn tone. 'The mighty Zitzka became a prey to so terrible a paroxysm of rage that in the height of his fury he vowed to commence an immediate crusade against the whole Bohemian Aristocracy. Yes,—he swore that he would extirpate the very germs of nobility from the land, raze their feudal castles to the ground, partition their estates, and proclaim an universal equality of rank throughout Bohemia.'

'And will the Captain-General seek to accomplish this vow, lady?' inquired Angela Wildon, taking especial care to render her voice as masculine in its intonation as she possibly could.

'Within ten days from the present time will that crusade commence,' responded Gloria; 'unless, indeed,' she added, after a few moments' pause, 'the Captain-General should relent, which is by no means probable. But you, brave unknown,' she exclaimed, turning towards Angela, 'are you in any way interested in this decision of the mighty Zitzka? do you belong to some proud and wealthy Bohemian family, whose ancestral castle will thereby be menaced with siege and sack, and whose patrimonial domains will be subjected to division amongst the vassals now toiling thereon?'

'No, lady,' answered Angela; 'I am of humble birth, and of equally humble pretensions; and the crusade contemplated by the Captain-General can only injure me in the sympathies which I entertain, and not in respect to any interests of a more selfish nature.'

'Ah! then your sympathies are with the Bohemian aristocracy?' exclaimed the Daughter of Glory.

'Not so, lady—far from it!' cried Angela. 'Sprung from the people myself—at least so I am bound to believe—my sympathies are with the people; yes, and in favor of religious and political reform. But still there may be noblemen in whose welfare I can feel interested, and whose ruin would afflict me profoundly.'

'Our unknown friend, beauteous lady,' exclaimed De Colmar, hastily addressing himself to Gloria, for he fancied that the conversation was touching upon delicate ground for his youthful deliverer, whom—as the reader will remember—he knew to have likewise been the liberator of the three nobles from the Castle of Prague, a fact which, considering Gloria's connexion with the Taborites, it was of course necessary to keep concealed from her, 'our unknown friend has gone so far as to admit by implication that he in reality sympathises with the Reformer of Mount Tabor. But as you are well aware that *I* have no right nor power *now* to interfere in Bohemian politics.' he added, lowering his voice so as to render his words audible only to Gloria, 'you would do well, fair lady, not to raise any discussion wherein I may not bear a part. For the compact which was imposed upon me on behalf of your sister Satanais, contained a clause to that effect.'

'Yes, I am no stranger to the severe conditions to which you were bound to assent,' murmured Gloria, also speaking in a low tone. 'And it was for the love of Satanais that you dared so much danger and embraced such arbitrary terms,' she added, in a tremulous voice, and with a look full of undefinable feelings.

'Oh! speak not to me again of a love which has no longer a hope,' responded Sir Ernest de Colmar; then spurring his horse suddenly forward, he exclaimed aloud, 'Behold a fine tract of level road stretching far as the eye can reach—let us put the mettle of our good steeds to the test.'

Angela and Gloria immediately followed the example which the knight thus gave them; and as the romantic lady of transcendant beauty urged her own graceful palfrey into that swift gallop, she again murmured within the depths of her soul, while she threw a burning look of passion upon De Colmar, '*He is mine! he is mine!*'

CHAPTER LIV.

THE INN,

THE sun was setting behind the western hills as the cavalcade rode up to the door of a large way-side hostel, the first day's journey terminating at this point.

Forth from the old, spacious, and straggling building came the landlord and landlady, the hostler and the female dependants; and all possible attention was instantaneously displayed towards the travellers. For the gilded spurs upon De Colmar's heels, and the splendid apparel of Gloria, together with the appearance of the page Ermach, the two handmaidens, and the grooms with the sumpter-horses, naturally led the inmates of the hostel to suppose that they were about to receive distinguished guests.

The inn was situated in a lonely spot, and belonged neither to town nor village. It was one of those old way-side establishments which, combining the advantages of farm house and hostel, furnished their proprietors with two modes of obtaining a livelihood. Thus the landlord was as clever at driving a good bargain for his cattle or his grain, at the nearest market-town, as he was civil and obliging to the guests who stopped to partake of refreshment or seek repose beneath his roof.

The appearance of so numerous a party as that which now stopped at the inn, threw the entire establishment into a bustle, but by no means into confusion. For while the cook instantaneously commenced her preparations in the kitchen, the landlord and the hostler took charge of the travellers' steeds, and the landlady lost no time in getting chambers ready for the reception of the guests.

When Gloria retired to the apartment thus provided for her, in order to arrange her toilette ere the supper was served up, De Colmar and Angela found themselves alone together for a few minutes in the best parlor which the hostel could afford.

'What think you, my brave unknown, of our fair travelling-companion?' inquired the knight, tossing aside his plumed cap and throwing himself into a large arm-chair.

'I think that she is very beautiful,' answered Angela, unable to stifle the sigh which made her virgin bosom heave within the bright cuirass.

'Ah! beauty is not the only qualification which is required to make woman adorable,' said De Colmar. 'Within the last few weeks, my dear friend, I have encountered three charming beings, each of whom possesses loveliness enough to engender another Trojan war, or make another Anthony lose the empire of the world. And yet these three beauteous creatures are as different from each other as light is from darkness. First, there was Satanais—'

'The sister of Gloria, I believe?' said Angela, inquiringly. I have heard her spoken of once or twice.'

'Yes, she is the sister of Gloria,' returned De Colmar; 'and if you have never seen her, my brave unknown, then are you utterly unable to comprehend, from any description which I could give, the dark splendor of her wondrous beauty. But conceive a being having Gloria's shape, Gloria's features, and Gloria's eyes, and yet whose hair is as black as jet, and whose complexion is a deep, transparent olive, or rather a rich bistre though the carnation shows itself upon the cheeks, and the blue tracery of sapphire veins is distinctly visible. Yes, immense is the contrast between the Daughter of Glory and the Daughter of Satan; and yet all the physical distinction lies in the hair and in the complexion.'

'But the moral difference?' said Angela, in a tone which trembled slightly notwithstanding her efforts to steady it; for she began to fear that in the enthusiasm wherewith the knight spoke of Satanais, she read the answers to those queries which she had put to herself in the morning, and which then defied all possibility of conjecture.

'Ah! moral distinction,' ejaculated De Colmar; 'but I must not—no, I dare not express my sentiments on that point,' he added, rather in a musing tone to himself than as if continuing the discourse with Angela. 'But I told you,' he exclaimed almost immediately, and with an evident desire to give at least a partial turn to the conversation, 'I told you that I had encountered during the last few weeks, three women whose beauty made more impression upon my mind than ever did female loveliness before. I have already mentioned Satanais and Gloria—and the third is that very Angela Wildon of whom you must have doubtless overheard me speak this morning to the Daughter of Glory.'

The forest-maiden was so astounded

by the unexpected turn which the discourse thus suddenly took, that she was utterly unable to make any reply to the warrior who was thus speaking to her of *her own self!*

'Yes,' continued De Colmar, perceiving not the sudden start which she had given and which had caused her armor to vibrate from head to heel as she stood leaning against the massive oaken table in the middle of the room; her aventayle closed over that countenance which was now suffused with burning blushes, and her bosom heaving and falling beneath the polished cuirass with all the rapidity attendant upon an excitement suddenly awakened; 'yes, I have indeed been much struck by the distinctive beauties as well as the individual characters of Satanais, Gloria, and Angela. For all that is profoundly absorbing in the heart's most potent passion, and for all the deep intoxication of a voluptuous abandonment—for all that tenderness which is most melting and which is calculated to bathe the soul in a fount of blissful languor—Satanais is the houri to charm away her adorer's existence thus! But for the ardent worshipper of thst love which produces a delirium of the brain, dazzles the sense, and ravishes the feelings—for the heart which can endure the incessant excitement of a bewildering passion, and for the eyes that can ever look upon a perfect blaze of celestial loveliness—Gloria is the fitting object for such a love as this.'

The knight paused, and a profound silence reigned in the room for upwards of a minute.

'You have not completed your description,' said Angela at length, scarcely daring to trust her tongue with a remark which in one sense seemed to shock her natural delicacy and purity of soul, but which in another appeared divested of all impropriety, not only because the knight had himself associated her name with those of Gloria and Satanais, but also because she was speaking in her assumed masculine character.

'No, I have not completed my description,' exclaimed De Colmar, who spoke not immediately, but seemed to weigh with deliberation the remark which had been made. 'Because,' he continued, in a measured tone, 'it is difficult to comprehend the precise nature of those feelings which must animate the man who turns from the contemplation of the splendid Satanais and the magnificent Gloria to the retired, modest, and bashful Angela Wildon. And yet, as the memory recals each feature and each charm of that forest-maiden, it is impossible to close the eyes to the fact that she possesses a beauty calculated to make a more permanent impression upon the heart—or rather to entwine itself by degrees around the heart and thus secure it beyond all possibility of release. In a word, my dear young friend,' added De Colmar, 'since we are thus talking confidentially upon a topic which, I confess, is somewhat new to me—namely, the topic of love—I will frankly admit that had I never seen Satanais, I feel I could love that beauteous, artless maiden, Angela Wildon, with all the purest devotion and the most holy affection—But, heavens! what ails you, my friend?'

And as De Colmar thus suddenly interrupted himself with an ejaculatory question, he sprang from his seat to catch Angela in his arms; for a sudden faintness had come over her, and staggering forward a few paces, she would have fallen had not the knight's abrupt exclamation and prompt movement instantaneously recalled her to herself. Then, recovering her self-possession and therewith her strength also, she said in a tremulous tone and in broken sentences, 'It is nothing—a passing indisposition—but it is gone——'

'Ah! a light breaks in upon me!' ejaculated De Colmar, with a strange abruptness and an almost wild excitement. 'And, Oh! pardon me, then, if I have said aught to offend you——'

'What mean you? Oh? what do you mean?' demanded Angela, now feeling convinced that she had betrayed herself, and that he had conjectured who she really was.

'Again I beseech your pardon, my dear friend,' cried De Colmar, 'if I have give utterance to a word that was calculated to offend you; but I have read your secret——'

'My secret" murmured our heroine, trembling from head to foot, and grasping the table to sustain herself—for she staggered more beneath the influence of her own over-wrought feelings than under the weight of her panoply. 'My secret!' she repeated, with impassioned vehemence.

'Yes, your secret, noble-hearted youth,' returned De Colmar; for your words, your manner, everything has betrayed it——'

'And that secret?' cried Angela, agonisingly impatient.

'You know Angela Wildon,' exclaimed Sir Ernest; 'and you love her!'

'Yes, as my own life,' responded the forest-maiden, suddenly experiencing all the elasticity alike of mind and body arising from this immense relief.

'Then may you be happy with her, my dear friend,' rejoined Sir Ernest de Colmar: for I feel convinced she is a prize that a sovereign prince might be proud to win!'

'Thanks, ten thousand thanks for your generous wishes, and for your kind sentiment,' murmured Angela.

At this moment the domestics of the inn made their appearance to lay the table for supper; and Angela, drawing De Colmar aside, said to him in a low and hurried tone, 'You will excuse me for the rudeness of which I am about to be guilty—that of retiring to my own chamber—inasmuch as to preserve my incognito, I must take my repast alone——'

'No apology is needed, my gallant friend,' interrupted De Colmar; 'nor should you labor under any embarrassment on that account. Good night to thee, brave youth.'

'Good night, my generous friend,' returned Angela; and she hastened away to the chamber which had been prepared for her reception.

In the meantime the Daughter of Glory had arranged her toilette which the day's travelling had somewhat disturbed; and she was about to retrace her way to the apartment where she had left De Colmar and Angela together, when in the long, dark passage of the old inn she encountered the young page Ermach.

Ah! this is most opportune,' she exclaimed, but in a whispering tone. 'I wished to speak to thee, boy——But follow me to my chamber, where we can converse a moment without fear of being interrupted or observed.'

'Lead on, Marietta,' said the youth, in a cold tone.

'Hush! not by that name am I now known,' returned Gloria, with mingled anger and entreaty; then, turning hastily round, she led the way to her own apartment.

'What would you with me?' demanded the page, evidently laboring to conceal some powerful emotion beneath an assumption of coldness and reserve.

'Let us understand each other, Ermach,' said the Daughter of Glory. 'We will be friends, shall we not?'

'Of what value can my friendship be to you, Marietta?' demanded the boy, his lip quivering, and his eyes sweeping their fervid, devouring looks over the features and the form of the resplendent beauty.

'Call me not by that name, which I loathe and hate,' she said, in a tone of half command and half entreaty. 'But again do I ask whether we are to be friends, or foes?'

'Wherefore should I manifest forbearance or friendship towards you?' asked Ermach, the studied iciness of his manner thawing not beneath the sunny looks of the lady. 'It is true that when you were an inmate——'

'Yes—yes, I comprehend!' interrupted Gloria, impatiently. 'Mention not the place, the walls have ears.'

'Well, it is needless to name the place, then,' resumed Ermach; 'suffice it to say that when we were dwelling beneath the same roof, *I* as a humble dependant, and *you* as one of the bright stars of that terrestrial galaxy of beauty, I loved you—yes, I was bold enough to love you——no, not to love only, but to adore, to worship you——'

'Ah! that unhappy love of thine!' exclaimed Gloria. 'But thou hast forgotten it.'

'No, I have not forgotten it, nor shall I ever!' responded Ermach, in a deep tone, which sounded strangely and even ominously when coming from the lips of one so young. 'But if I remember it now, if I have remembered it ever since, and if I shall continue to remember it, proud lady,' he continued, with a more severe accentuation, 'it is only because I have associated another sentiment with that passion——'

'And this new sentiment?' said Gloria, interrogatively.

'Vengeance!' replied Ermach, bitterly.

'Oh! but this is cruel—cowardly—unmanly!' exclaimed Gloria, scarcely able to conceal the trepidation which was gaining upon her.

'I care not how severe may be the epithets which you ascribe to my conduct,' said Ermach; 'they will not be more severe than was your behaviour towards me when I threw myself at your feet, and avowed the love that was maddening me! Oh! never, never shall I forget that moment; and never, never can I sufficiently avenge it! You

laughed at me—you ridiculed me—you spurned me, haughty lady, and——'

'And you will forgive me? oh! you will forgive me?' exclaimed Gloria, now becoming seriously alarmed. 'Tell me, Ermach—tell me that you will forgive me!'

'Never—never!' returned the implacable youth, surveying her with looks wherein diabolical hatred and burning lust were horribly commingled.

'But what will you do to me? how will you make me feel your power?' demanded Gloria, trembling from head to foot, while her bosom of dazzling whiteness heaved convulsively beneath the black lace which covered it.

'You love Sir Ernest de Colmar!' said the page, in a low, thick, and hoarse tone, which was expressive of fiendish triumph.

'Ah!' ejaculated Gloria. 'But no—you are mistaken, Ermach——'

'Vain is your attempt to deceive me, lady,' interrupted the youth. 'Oh! by the warm and sunny glances which you have this day thrown upon him—by the impassioned ardor with which you have contemplated him.'

'Enough—enough!' said Gloria, sharply. 'Granted, then, that your supposition is correct, and that I love Sir Ernest de Colmar——'

'His excellency has behaved kindly and generously to me,' exclaimed Ermach; 'he has snatched me away from a place which I abhorred, and a mode of existence which I detested.'

'Yes, I understand that you rendered him good service last night,' said Gloria. 'But remember your oath, Ermach, that oath which forbids you to reveal the mysteries of the White Mansion and of Hamelen Castle,'

'Lady, I shall respect that oath,' observed the page, indignantly; 'but without violating it, I may whisper enough in the ear of Sir Ernest de Colmar——'

'No—no, you would not ruin me thus, Ermach?' cried Gloria, clasping her hands in passionate entreaty; 'you would not overwhelm me with shame and disgrace in the presence of the man I love? Will nothing move you? neither prayers, nor tears——'

'Yes, lady, there is one condition, and only one——' said Ermach, still rivetting upon the radiant beauty those looks which seemed capable of scorching and burning with the intense heat of maddened desire.

'And that condition?' demanded Gloria, quivering all over beneath the influence of the presentiment that enabled her to anticipate the answer which she was about to receive to her question.

'That condition,' repeated the page, in a slow and measured tone, while he advanced his countenance so near to Gloria's face that she felt upon her cheeks the youth's breath which was hot and fevered with his deeply excited desires; 'that condition, lady, is easily comprehended by a woman standing in the presence of one whose breast is rent by furious passions that must either be voluptuously assuaged or terribly avenged.'

'Yes, I comprehend you now, Ermach, said Gloria, a ghastly pallor overspreading her countenance, while an ominous lustre gleamed in her magnificent eyes, and her lips were for a moment compressed violently, as if she had suddenly armed herself with the resolution to which despair could alone have urged her.

'You comprehend me, and you assent,' exclaimed her youthful persecutor, his countenance lighting up with an expression of ferocious satyr-like triumph.

'I assent, because there is no alternative,' responded Gloria, in a glacial tone.

'O adorable lady! I will continue to love as much as I was prepared to hate you!' cried Ermach, in a tone of almost wild enthusiasm. 'From the instant that you surrender yourself to me,—from the moment that you have abandoned yourself to my arms——Oh!—thenceforth I will become your slave, and even my very existence shall be at your disposal! And this night, Gloria, dear Gloria, when all is silent throughout the inn——'

'Which is your chamber, Ermach?' demanded the lady abruptly, as she for a moment suffered the youth to take her hand and press it in his own.

'The last on the left hand side, at the end of the passage,' he answered, completely intoxicated with the dream of bliss in which all his senses were now wrapped. 'And you will come, dear lady, but not in anger—no, nor with the glacial manner and severe looks of a victim——'

'Fear not, Ermach,' interrupted Gloria, darting upon him a glance in which he fancied that he perceived the light of a passion akin to his own, 'yielding to the force of circumstances, I shall abandon myself to the full tide of love and happiness.'

'O adorable Gloria!' murmured the page, and pressing her hand to his lips, he hurried from the room.

For a few minutes longer did the Daughter of Glory remain in her apartment in order to compose her countenance and tranquillise her thoughts,—and when she descended to the parlor where the supper was at that moment being served up, it would have been impossible for even the must attentive observer of human nature to perceive any traces of that storm which had so recently passed over her soul.

A copious repast was spread upon a large table, in the middle of which stood a huge pewter saltseller. Above this utensil, which in those times was a line of demarcation between gentility and dependancy, the Daughter of Glory and De Colmar were seated; while at the lower end of the board, Ermach and the two damsels took their places. Angela Wildon, be it recollected, had retired to her own chamber.

Between the Austrian knight and Gloria the conversation turned upon the various salient points of the scenery through which their journey had led them during the day; but an almost total silence prevailed at the other extremity of the table. For on the one hand Ermach was absorbed in the voluptuous reflections with which he feasted his fancy; and, on the other hand, Linda and Beatrice were both a prey to the deepest melancholy on account of Lionel and Konrad, whose mysterious disappearance had been communicated to them by Ermach during the day.

Shortly after supper, the party broke up; and the travellers retired to their respective apartments.

But, though somewhat fatigued with travelling, especially as he had enjoyed no rest on the previous night, Sir Ernest de Colmar nevertheless felt not the least inclination to seek his couch.—Opening the window, he gazed forth into the moon-lit night; and for nearly half an hour did he remain at the casement, giving way to the various reflections which crowded in upon his brain.

Deeply, deeply did he regret that stern necessity which had compelled him to leave Prague to a day and an hour, without haviag discovered the fate of his two pages, and also without having been enabled to lend the slightest succor to the Princess Elizabetha; and as his thoughts fell into this channel, it struck him that he had not as yet found a moment's leisure to question Ermach relative to the character, proceedings, and pursuits of the inmates of the White Mansion.

He remembered that the Baroness Hamelen, when he first encountered her in the streets of Prague, had spoken of the delights and fascinations of her mansion; he recollected also that Ermach had denounced it as an accursed place when beseeching the knight to take him thence, and he was moreover well convinced that it was the head-quarters of the terrible band belonging to the tribunal of the Bronze Statue.—All these circumstances, now recurring vividly to his memory, excited within him a sudden and irresistible sentiment of curiosity, to know more respecting that abode of mystery, luxuriousness, and perhaps crime.

Animated with this feeling, and yielding to its impulse, Sir Ernest de Colmar resolved to obtrude for a little space upon the time allotted to the repose of Ermach; and as a profound silence now reigned throughout the inn, the knight stole gently forth from his chamber. Being unwilling to disturb, much more to alarm the inmates of the hostel in their slumbers, he preserved the same noiseless pace as he threaded the long passage, which was involved in total darkness.

But, on drawing near the chamber appropriated to Ermach, De Colmar was surprised to behold a light streaming forth from the open door,—and he advanced, with continued caution, to the threshold.

And there he suddenly became transfixed with the paralysis of indescribable amazement.

For, behold—by the side of the couch in which Ermach, exhausted by the fatigues of the day, had been surprised by slumber, notwithstanding his appointment with the object of his devouring passion,—there, we say, by the side of that bed, stood the Daughter of Glory!

Her hair rolled in refulgent yellow waves over her alabaster shoulders,—the negligence of her attire left her bosom of dazzling whiteness partially exposed; and in one hand she carried a lamp, the lustre whereof played fitfully upon her countenance which struck De Colmar as being pale, deadly pale!

The knight was astonished—astounded; petrified with a wonderment amounting to an awe and a consternation, he remained upon the threshold, motionless and speechless as a statue!

And Gloria contemplated the sleeping page for nearly a minute; and then it suddenly appeared to De Colmar that her countenance all in a moment underwent a fearful change; and the cold, glacial pallor was succeeded by an expression of diabolical ferociousness.

A shudder swept through the entire form of Sir Ernest de Colmar; but at the same instant the white arm of Gloria was raised over the couch of the sleeping page; and a poinard which she grasped in her hand, gleamed in the lustre of the lamp like a lightning flash.

And with the ineffable speed, too, of the vivid lightning did the weapon descend; and at the very same instant that the murderous blow was dealt, an ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he sprang into the chamber.

CHAPTER LV.

THE MURDERESS.

The effect produced upon Gloria by the sudden appearance of Sir Ernest de Colmar in the midst of that scene of midnight murder, was as if the Medusa's head had all in a moment sprung up before her. Transfixed with mortal dread, she seemed to have been changed into a statue just at the very instant when the first feelings of horror, anguish, amazement, and rage were electrified into vivid vitality in her soul; and the expression of these mingled emotions remained stamped upon her countenance, as if it congealed in all its ghastliness the instant that it seized upon those features which were naturally so full of splendor, and beauty, and light, and love!

The lamp fell not from her hand, nor did the arm move which upraised it; and the other arm remained stretched out rigidly and with the fingers distended, just as *that* hand was when it quitted its hold upon the dagger and experienced the petrifying influence which seized on every feature, member, muscle, and tendon all in a moment! Nor did a word escape the lips of the Daughter of Glory—those lips which were now wide apart and colorless as the blanched cheeks themselves! Her eyes, no longer glowing with a heavenly lustre, seemed to shine with the sinister light of hell; but even this light was steady and motionless—vibrating not, and thus adding solemnly and awfully to the statue-like aspect of the guilty creature who was so profoundly paralysed by her own unutterable feelings.

De Colmar had given vent to an ejaculation of horror, and had burst with startling abruptness into the room; but the wild and terrible effect which his presence thus produced upon Gloria—freezing as it were the very blood in her veins, and changing her whole form into ice or marble—operated with a species of reaction upon himself, and made him stop short under the influence of a sudden panic.

And for nearly a minute did those two beings stand thus confronting each other—the noble-hearted knight and the guilty woman—the former scarcely able to believe the evidence of his own senses, and still fancying that he must be laboring under the influence of an appalling dream, and the latter so completely a prey to the profoundest consternation that she only experienced all the tremendous weight of her crushing thoughts without having the power to analyse them in detail.

At length De Colmar suddenly threw off the spell which horror and amazement had cast upon him; and snatching the lamp from Gloria's hand, he advanced to the bed wherein the page lay. But the victim was past all human succor; deep, deep into his heart had the weapon pierced, and with such unerring effect had the blow been dealt, that no wonder was it if the unfortunate youth had expired instantaneously, without a groan, and even without moving an inch to the right or to the left in that couch which had become the bed of death instead of wanton pleasure.

'Gloria, is this possible?' said De Colmar, in a low and scarcely audible tone, as he turned his eyes from the scene of murder to the countenance of the murderess.

'O God! have mercy upon me!' exclrimed the Daughter of Glory, now bursting, as it were, from her statue-like trance into all the poignant animation of her agonising feelings; and covering her face with her hands, she melted into a flood of tears.

Between her taper fingers trickled fast the pearly drops of her anguish; and as she threw her head backward in the convulsive writhings which her body derived from the soul's excruciating agony, the heavings of her bosom became fully apparent.

'And yet there *were* those motives, and there *is* that extenuation!' cried the Daughter of Glory, catching eagerly at the words which had thus fallen from De Colmar's lips, as eagerly as the affrighted wretch falling down a precipice grasps at the slightest twig which his desperate touch encounters. 'But I cannot ask you to believe that I am more unfortunate than guilty, more to be pitied than blamed,' continued Gloria, in a voice of rending anguish; 'for circumstances have combined—oh! cruelly combined—to ruin me in your estimation; I, who sought to gain your golden opinion, and cared not what all the world might think of me so long as you were my friend.'

And once more did the unhappy being cover her countenance with her hands and give way to the most lacerating anguish that ever wrung the female heart.

'Your friend! yes, Gloria, I sought to remain your friend,' cried De Colmar; 'but, holy God! what can I think of you now? Remember the scene in the grove near Prague, it was one of bloodshed and death; behold the scene which is now at hand, and again is it bloodshed and death!'

'Yes, oh! yes—my God——But torture me not!' moaned Gloria, falling upon her knees; then, clasping her hands, and extending them thus united towards De Colmar, she exclaimed in a tone of passionate entreaty, 'Hear me! hear me, for a moment—only for a moment, I beseech you! That I shall lose your friendship, I am aware; that I must part from your company, never to behold you more, is likewise certain. But I would not have you leave me with the impression on your soul that I am a cold-blooded murderess! No, deep, deep was the provocation which I received from that youth, who, in the midst of his slumber, has thus passed into eternity, sent thither by my vindictive weapon! For there are wrongs and outrages, Sir Knight, which would goad even an angel on to crime—if crime it be in such a case!'

'And those wrongs, Gloria—those outrages?' said De Colmar inquiringly, but at the same time reguarding the unhappy lady with an increasing coldness and sternness, augmenting almost to a loathing and aversion—too real and too true not to be apparent upon his countenance.

'It were a long history—too long to narrate now,' exclaimed the Daughter of Glory. 'Besides,' she added, abruptly quitting her kneeling posture and springing to her feet, 'I perceive that my character is unredeemably damaged in your Excellency's estimation—and there remains no alternative for me but to bid you farewell for ever.'

These words were uttered in a low tone, full of concentrated feeling, and yet with such an ambiguity of manner and accompanied by so strange an expression of countenance on the part of Gloria, that De Colmar was suddenly impressed with the idea that she only spoke and acted thus in order to mask some ulterior and sinister intention.

'You speak of bidding me farewell for ever,' he said; 'and yet I know not how this proposal on your side can be carried out. For, in the first place, am I not pledged to the Enemy of Mankind to conduct you to Vienna?—and must I not fulfil that condition of the infernal compact to the utmost of my power? In the second place, what course is to be adopted relative to the corpse of your victim? and how shall we play the part of hypocrites in the morning and wear unruffled countenances when the dread moment comes at which a terrible rumor shall spread through the hostel that a foul and diabolical murder has been committed during the night? Oh! how heavy and cruel is the task which the Evil One has imposed upon me!—and how intolerable now becomes the burthen that I have taken upon my shoulders for thy sake, O Satanais!'

And, flinging himself on a chair, Sir Ernest de Colmar pressed his hand to his throbbing brow in order to steady the thoughts that were agitating so fiercely in his brain.

'Do you regret all that you have done for Satanais, because Gloria is so unworthy of your consideration?' asked the lovely but wretched and guilty young lady, her manner all of a sudden assuming an extraordinary meekness and humility as she put that question in a voice tremulous with the most painful suspense. 'No Ernest, you cannot be so unjust, so ungenerous,' she continued, the timidity with which she commenced this address yielding to an eloquent enthusiasm as she continued. 'Satanis is virtuous, spotless, and immaculate, although Gloria's hands be stained with blood! Satanais has in no way forfeited her claims upon your friendship—your remembrance—your love; whereas Gloria is a being whom you can henceforth only view with

aversion. Tell me, then, Sir Knight, tell me that Satanais has not suffered in your estimation on account of *my* crimes.'

'God forbid that I should prove so cruel and so unjust towards the memory of your absent sister!' exclaimed De Colmar; and as his eyes were raised at that instant towards the countenance of Gloria as she stood before him, he was struck by the strange and and incomprehensible expression of mingled joy and triumph which swept over her features, and which she could not prevent from thus flinging its light for a moment upon her face.

'A thousand thanks for that assurance, Sir Knight,' she exclaimed, perceiving that he had observed the sentiment which from the depths of her soul had just been reflected in her countenance. 'Devoted as I am to my sister I would not that the effects of any misdeeds or misfortunes on my part should redound upon her.'

'Nor shall such be the case—at least so far as I am concerned,' observed De Colmar. 'But the night is wearing on, nothing is decided, and the longer I contemplate the cruel embarrassments in which I am now placed, the more I am bewildered. O, Gloria! by what terrible destiny are you ruled—by what appalling fate are you governed? Though devoted by your deceased parents to the service of heaven, it would almost appear as if Satan held dominion over you, as erst he did with regard to thy sister.'

'Oh! there are indeed terrible mysteries——But I dare not trust myself even for a moment with those thoughts!' exclaimed Gloria, suddenly interrupting herself in the middle of her first sentence. 'And now, with respect to the embarrassment wherein you are placed, leave it all to me—retire to your own chamber—endeavor to snatch the repose which you require——'

'Impossible!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'You must judge me strangely, Gloria, if you imagine that I can take matters thus calmly and indifferently. Here is a murder to be accounted for, and I neither wish to accuse you nor to draw down suspicion upon myself.'

'Heaven forbid that you should be suspected!' exclaimed the Daughter of Glory with a fervor that touched the knight's generous heart; for he perceived that this strange, romantic, and alas! guilty woman really loved him with a sincerity, a truth, and a devotion which dominated every other sentiment in her soul and was constantly paramount over all circumstances and events. 'No, no,' she cried, clasping her hands passionately, 'even if you were in reality the assassin, I would proclaim myself the murderess in order to screen you!'

'My God! how has it happened that a soul fraught with such transcendant generosity can have been betrayed into error or hurried on into crime!' exclaimed De Colmar, his looks now assuming an expression of boundless pity and commiseration as he fixed them upon the pale and agitated countenance of Gloria.

'Oh! you entertain a sentiment of compassion for me?' she cried, those woe-stricken features suddenly lighting up with joyousness; 'then you do not altogether hate, loathe and abhor me?'

'No, unfortunate lady, no,' responded De Colmar; 'I do not entertain feelings of bitterness towards you; but I sincerely, deeply sympathise with you in the stern cruelty of that tremendous fate which thus renders you the agent of evil and the instrument of crime! And believe me that I am not insensible to all the generous consideration which you experience towards me, and which transpires from every feature of your conduct, every phase of your manner! But once more I must recall my own thoughts and likewise your attention to the dread topic which should alone occupy them: for time is passing rapidly—and nothing is yet resolved upon.'

'Will you consent to be guided by me?' demanded the Daughter of Glory, speaking with a rapidity and firmness suited to the dilemma of the position in which the Knight and herself were placed.

'I cannot pledge myself to such a course,' was his response. 'For, taking it as granted that you are indeed the victim of irresistible circumstances and not a cold-blooded murderess—admitting, I say, that your exceptional destiny dooms you to a career as dreadful to yourself as it seems fatal to others—I cannot permit you to incur the danger and risk the penalties which would result from an avowal of this deed. For the sake of John Zitzka, who is interested in you—for the sake of your sister, who loves you fondly and affectionately—yes, and for your own sake also, Gloria,' added the Knight, 'I must not—dare not—will not abandon you to the consequences of your misfortune or

crime, whichever it may really be. For you are too young to die now—and to die, too, by the hand of the executioner ——Oh! no--that may not be! You must have time to repent of your misdeeds and to combat against that appalling doom which thus makes a mockery of your very name and turns into diabolical ridicule the appellation of *Daughter of Glory!* Yes, poor fallen angel that thou art,' added the Knight, compassionately, 'there is something so strangely romantic and so appallingly mysterious in your destiny that I feel it were an injustice to treat you as an ordinary mortal and judge you by the usual standard of human ideas. Oh! would it not almost seem as if the infernal power which until lately ruled the fate of Satanais, had grasped hold of thee?—would it not almost appear as if thou and thy sister had changed positions and places in the world, in every thing save in names? Yes—yes—it must be so: and, deeply—deeply as I loathe the crime which thou hast perpetrated—yet do I as profoundly pity thee!'

'Sir Ernest,' said Gloria, in a tone which denoted profound feeling—and she bent down her lustrous eyes as she spoke—'I thank you sincerely——Oh! God only knows how sincerely—for the kindness, the forbearance, and the consideration which mark your language and your conduct towards me. But grant me your patience for a few minutes—and listen attentively to what I am about to say. The terrible tragedy of this night has placed *you* in a position which suggests *two* questions relative to myself. The first is how you can possibly fulfil that condition of your compact which commands you to escort me to Vienna; and the second is, whether you shall permit justice to take its proper course in respect to the deed—the lamentable deed—whose victim is *there;*' —and she pointed shudderingly towards the bed, but without turning her eyes in the same direction. 'Upon those two points, hear what I have to observe. And, in the first place, it must necessarily strike you that if any attempt be made on my part to escape suspicion on account of this crime, the result will be either that I shall fail in such endeavor and draw down on myself the suspicion I may thus wish to avoid—or that this suspicion will fall on an innocent person, whom circumstantial evidence may involve in its mesh and ultimately destroy. Secondly, to conceal the crime is impossible: for even if the sudden disappearance of the youth in the middle of the night could be accounted for by any pretext, the bedclothes would tell the tale of blood—and there is no time to efface the sanguine stains! It is therefore necessary that the deed should be avowed—yes, avowed openly and frankly—avowed by *me* ——'

'And the consequences, Gloria—oh! the consequences!' exclaimed De Colmar, powerfully excited.

'Fear nothing on that score!' said the beauteous creature, now raising her eyes and glancing for a moment upon the knight's anxious, agitated countenance. 'I assure you, beyond all possibility of doubt, that I shall escape from whatever danger may menace me, and that I already foresee the certainty of a prompt egress from the temporary difficulties in which an avowal of the crime may plunge me. You therefore perceive how necessary it is, for many reasons, that the truth should be told fearlessly and at once,' added Gloria, in a firm tone and with resolute manner, 'yes, it is necessary to save *you* from a suspicion that would be worse to *me* than a thousand deaths and ten thousand dangers, necessary also to avert suspicion from others who are as innocent as yourself,—and necessary, likewise, in order that the sequel of this lamentable tragedy may take a proper and legitimate course, without requiring that sacrifice of honorable feeling and integrity of principle on your part which would be involved in any endeavor to conceal the deed and plunge the entire scene into mystery and darkness.'

'Then you are to sacrifice yourself that I may be saved from suspicion on the one hand, or from the necessity of consenting to the concealment of the crime on the other?' said De Colmar.

'It is no self-sacrifice which I propose, returned Gloria, 'since I alone am guilty!'

'True!' ejaculated the knight, unable to repress a certain feeling of admiration for that extraordinary being who, all murderess though she were, yet gave so many touching evidences of regard. tenderness, and consideration towards himself. 'But are you confident that you can eventually escape from all the perils attendant upon the course which you are chalking out for your own footsteps to pursue?'

'As confident as I am in my own un-

happy and doomed existence,' replied Gloria. 'But even should that succor which I anticipate, fail me, even should the aid on which I believe that I may rely, come not effectually and promptly —then will it remain for you, Sir Knight, to order my release from custody, in the name of the Captain-General of the Taborites.'

'I order your release, Gloria!' repeated Sir Ernest de Colmar, surveying the beauteous creature with an indescribable wonderment. 'And by what authority——'

'Listen,' said Gloria, laying her taper fingers upon his arm, in order to obtain his full attention. 'Within a few hours from the present time, this hostel will be occupied by the authorities of the law and their military attendants, who will be summoned hither from the adjacent market-town to take cognizance of all the particulars of the night's tragedy. Now, as all this district is occupied by the Taborites, it will be a Taborite guard into whose care I shall be consigned. And the officer of that guard will obey, promptly and without a word, the command which you, Sir Knight, may give him to throw open the door of my prison-chamber and permit me to fly.'

'But wherefore should he obey me thus readily and silently?' asked De Colmar, still regarding Gloria with astonishment. 'What talisman do I possess which can have the power——'

'There!' said the Daughter of Glory, laying her finger upon the ring which John Zitzka had given to our hero, and which flashed brilliantly in the lamplight.

'Ah!' ejaculated De Colmar, now surprised at himself for not having remembered the possession of a jewel whose influence had already been put to the test—namely, on the night when he rode forth to combat against the Enemy of Mankind, 'I am well pleased,' he added, 'that you have remembered me of my ability to save you, should my succor become necessary. But touching the continuation of your journey to Vienna——'

'Our travel in each other's society has already ended,' said Gloria, interrupting De Colmar with a firmness of tone and manner which showed that her mind was already resolved how to act. 'No fault will it be of yours, if circumstances over which *you* have no control compel me to separate from you; besides,' she added, darting a strange and wild look upon our hero's countenance, 'if Satan will that we should continue to journey together, he cannot be at a loss for means to accomplish his aims.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar was amazed and startled by an observation which appeared so rife with a levity almost amounting to flippancy, that he could scarcely believe his own ears; but observing that Gloria's features had instantly assumed an expression of solemn mournfulness, after her eyes had thrown that wild glance upon him, he felt convinced that she had intended nothing which could be rightly construed into an indecorous disregard of the appalling scene so near, or of the share which she had taken in producing it.

'You tell me that our journey together has already been brought to an end?' said De Colmar.

'Yes, by the incidents of this night,' immediately responded Gloria. 'For, in the first place, I could not think of forcing my companionship upon you—the companionship of one whom you must regard as a murderess, in spite of all that generosity of soul which prompts you to look leniently and considerately upon me; and in the second place, even if I were so indelicate and so indecorous as to think of remaining in your society, I could not do so with safety, seeing that when I shall have escaped from the officers of justice I become a fugitive on the face of the land.'

'And are your resolves firmly taken?' asked De Colmar, contemplating with a profound compassion that being of transcendant loveliness whose doom appeared so strange, so wild, so terrible.

'No human power can shake my determination,' answered Gloria, the delicate hue of the carnation coming back to her cheeks and her eyes flashing forth the fires of a soul nerving itself to encounter dread danger face to face. 'Let us, therefore, say farewell, Sir Knight, or Ernest——Oh! yes,—I must address you in that friendly and fraternal manner once more,—for the last time——'

And now her eyes, an instant before so overpoweringly lustrous, filled with tears; but she immediately dashed away those pearly drops which hung for a moment quivering upon the long lashes; and her countenance assumed an air of ineffable tenderness, as she fastened her looks upon the Austrian warrior.

'I feel, Gloria,' he said, himself deeply moved with the immensity of the pity which filled his heart on account of that lovely being who was alike so unfortunate and so guilty, 'I feel as if I were perpetrating a deed of cowardice in thus abandoning you to all the uncertainties inevitably attendant on the course which you are about to pursue.'

'You would only plunge me into deeper and more inextricable difficulties, were you to oppose me in the resolution which I have taken,' she answered. 'And now farewell,—a long farewell,—a farewell perhaps for ever ——'

'But you will not remain *here*, Gloria?' said De Colmar, glancing with a shudder towards the corpse which lay rigid and ghastly in the blood-stained bed.'

'I shall leave the room within a few minutes after you have quitted it,' replied the Daughter of Gloria,—'and then, an alarm will be made throughout the house, and I shall proclaim myself a murderess!'

'Oh! would it not be better for you to fly?' exclaimed De Colmar, vehemently.

'And leave you perhaps to be suspected?' returned Gloria. 'No, no, my mind is made up! and now leave me—leave me!'

Thus speaking, she took De Colmar's hand, pressed it for an instant in her own, and then motioned him to withdraw.

He threw upon her a last look of boundless compassion, a look which saw only a beauteous and unfortunate woman, and not a murderess; and then, after a moment's hesitation, he retired noiselessly from the scene of crime to his own chamber.

And the Daughter of Glory remained alone with the ghastly corpse of her victim!

CHAPTER LVI.

THE SELF-ACCUSATION AND THE RESULT.

Half an hour had elapsed, and during that interval a profound silence reigned throughout the hostel; when suddenly the landlord and landlady were aroused by an abrupt and peremptory knocking at the door of their bed-chamber. Hastily rising from the couch, the landlord demanded who it was that thus disturbed his slumbers; and on hearing a reply given in a female tone, he bade his wife get up and see what was the matter. For the only answer he had obtained to his demand, was an imperious order to open the door.

The worthy woman rose forthwith in obedience to her husband's command; and opening the door, she started back in mingled terror and amazement when she beheld Gloria standing in the passage, with her hair and dress in disorder, her countenance ghastly pale, a wild light gleaming in her large velvet-black eyes, and her whole aspect rendered more terrible and spectre-like by the vascillating beams of the lamp which she carried in her hand.

'In the name of the blessed Virgin! what is the matter?' demanded the landlady, shrinking back in dismay.

'Bid your husband rise and follow me,' returned Gloria, in a deep tone. 'And you must accompany him,' she instantly added,

There was something in the Daughter of Glory's tone and manner which forbade all remonstrance, and produced too great an excitement to allow of any hesitation; the landlord and landlady accordingly huddled on each a few articles of clothing, both wondering what on earth could be the meaning of this strange disturbance at one o'clock in the morning, and yet feeling too much alarmed even to venture a guess between themselves.

'Come—despatch!' said Gloria, from the outside of their chamber-door, for she was impatient to get through this new act of her wild and terrible drama.

'We are ready, may it please your ladyship,' said the landlord, coming forth from the apartment, followed by his better half. 'What in the world can it be? Have the thieves broken in? or is your chamber troubled by evil spirits?'

'Silence, and come quickly,' said Gloria, leading the way along the straggling passage to the room which had been allotted to Ermach.

She entered that room—she advanced rapidly up to the bed—she held the lamp over it—she beckoned the landlord and landlady to approach, and then, as their looks recoiled from the appalling spectacle which they encountered, she exclaimed, 'I am the murderess!'

'You? impossible, lady!' ejaculated the landlord, his first thought being that horror had turned her brain.

'Oh! heavens! a murder, and in our

house!' shrieked the landlady, clasping her hands in anguish; then, suddenly yielding to her terror, she rushed into the passage, giving vent to piercing screams.

All the inmates of the hostel were speedily alarmed; and the domestics, male and female, rushed from the chambers in a condition of semi-nudity, under the apprehension that the house was on fire. But the still more awful cry of 'Murder!' ringing through the establishment, and breaking thus terribly upon the dead silence of the night, soon made the menials aware of the truth; and as Gloria continued to accuse herself, those who flocked around her had no alternative but to consider her as the guilty person. Thus amidst mingled execrations, cries of amazement, and ejaculations of horror, she was hurried along to her own chamber, which was to be guarded as a prison until the authorities in the adjacent town could be informed of the incident, and summoned to dispose of the self-accused murderess.

But who can describe the feelings which Linda and Beatrice experienced, when, summoned from their own apartment to attend upon their mistress in her chamber, they heard from the landlady the horrible intelligence which harrowed their very souls and curdled the blood in their veins. Then, the first shock being over, they refused to put faith in such a hideous accusation against their beloved mistress; but when they hastened into her presence and received from her own self-accusing lips the dread confirmation of the tremendous tidings, the two maidens abandoned themselves to a grief which Gloria experienced no small difficulty in appeasing.

In the meantime the landlord had rushed to the door of Sir Ernest de Colmar's chamber; and with a view to prevent his guest from attributing the disturbance in the house to any wrong cause, the worthy host hastily explained in a few broken and excited sentences the circumstances which had just taken place. Then, without waiting for any reply, he hurried away to repeat the proceeding at the door of Angela's apartment; and, having thus far eased his mind, the landlord despatched a messenger to the market-town to make the proper communication to the local authorities. He then stationed one of his men under the windows of Gloria's chamber, in order to prevent her escape in that quarter, should she make the endeavor; and another of his male dependants was ordered to enact the part of sentinel in the passage whence the apartment of the murderess opened.

Thus, between the hours of one and two on this memorable morning, the usually peaceful inn was thrown into the utmost confusion, bustle, and excitement; and neither landlord, landlady, nor menials thought of returning to the beds from which they had been aroused under such startling circumstances.

Sir Ernest de Colmar was most painfully excited by the events of this unhappy night; and after the landlord had made to him that communication which he had every minute been expecting with feverish suspense for the previous half hour, he continued to pace his chamber in an agitated manner, wondering what would be the issue of the awful drama that had opened with so frightful a tragedy, and deploring the fate which had connected his own career with the apparently doomed existence of Gloria. For it assuredly struck him that the Enemy of Mankind, in decreeing his separation from the Daughter of Satan, had foreseen and perhaps pre-arranged all the troubles and embarrassments which were to result from his compulsory association with the Daughter of Glory. And then the knight shuddered from head to foot and felt a strange and horrible sinking at the heart, as the reflection was forced upon his mind that on the memorable night when he espoused the cause of Satanais against the Prince of Darkness, he to a certain extent placed himself under that evil influence; and he experienced an appalling dread as he thought that this same influence had already begun, secretly, silently, and almost imperceptibly to wind its coils around him, and would perhaps continue thus to enmesh him in its insidious snares, so as gradually to carry him on amidst perils, annoyances, and vexations, until his utter destruction should prove the crowning catastrophe.

But we must leave the Austrian knight to his mournful reflections, in order to glance at the effect which the intelligence of the murder produced upon Angela Wildon.

This lovely maiden, on retiring to her own apartment in the evening, had partaken of some slight refreshment; and then, carefully securing the door, she had laid aside her armor and sought her

couch, her heart full of happiness on account of all that Sir Ernest de Colmar had said concerning herself when he was left alone with her for a few minutes in the parlor of the hostel.—And thus was it that slumber stole gently upon her eyes, as her mind was revolving with an innocent pleasure every word and sentiment that had fallen from the knight's lips on the occasion just referred to; and the same subject remained uppermost in her imagination in the dreams which accompanied her sleep. Yes; benign was her slumber and soft were her visions, when she was aroused abruptly and rudely from that delicious entrancement; and as the startled offspring of her fancy fled from her brain, the awful intelligence of a murder beat like the stunning roar of cannon upon her ears!

She could not believe that she was awake; no—nor even when she listened more intently still, and heard the excited voice of the landlord proclaiming from outside the door of her chamber the particulars of the awful tragedy which had been enacted that night!—But, at length, the forest maiden was compelled to yield to the conviction of her own senses; and the words of the host carried in unto her soul the astounding certainty that a murder had been committed, and that Gloria was the murderess!

Then did a cold tremor pass through the entire form of the forest-maiden; and, sitting up in her couch, she covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the view of some hideous object—although the light had been extinguished for some hours and her chamber was involved in an intense darkness. And she experienced a grief as profound and an anguish as excruciating as if she were Gloria's sister or near relative,—and then, yielding to the impulse of her own exalted piety, she quitted her couch, fell upon her knees, and prayed long and fervently to heaven on behalf of the Daughter of Glory.

Morning dawned, and with the rising sun came a party of Taborite soldiers from the adjacent market town. They were about a dozen in number, headed by an officer, and accompanied by the local magistrate, who was a venerable man with a long white beard and known as a devoted adherent of the cause espoused by John Zitzka.

Every body at the hostel was up and in expectation of the arrival of those who now made their appearance. Gloria, a close prisoner in her own chamber, was attended by her handmaidens, into whose souls she had succeeded in pouring some amount of consolation,—and, at all events, she had succeeded in convincing them that she was more an object of sympathy and commiseration than of blame and punishment. In the parlor below, Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela were conversing mournfully upon the dread incident which had marked the night, the former speaking only in gloomy monosyllables, and the latter generously suggesting a thousand things in extenuation of Gloria's guilt. We must also observe that Angela had resumed her steel panoply, and had not failed to close the barred vizor over her countenance.

On the arrival of the magistrate and the soldiers, the first care of the former was to order the officer to station sentinels in those two points where the landlord had temporarily posted his own men; and the venerable official then proceeded to visit the chamber where the murder had taken place. There he drew up a description of the exact state in which he found the corpse of the victim; and this duty having been accomplished, the magistrate ordered the landlord to conduct him to the apartment where the self-accused murderess was confined.

On arriving at the door of Gloria's chamber, the venerable official paused for a moment; and turning towards those who were in attendance upon him, he said, 'I shall enter alone into the presence of the unhappy lady who has committed a deed alike so heinous and unaccountable. It would only be adding to the poignant anguish which she must already feel, were a number of spectators to be present during the short interview which it is necessary that I should have with her; and as the outraged laws will in due course inflict condign chastisement, it would neither be delicate nor humane to torture the culprit beforehand by rendering her the object of an eager curiosity.'

The landlord, the landlady, the menials of the hostel, and several of the Taborite soldiers, who had followed the magistrate to the threshold of Gloria's apartment, all fell back when the magistrate addressed them in this style of half-rebuke and half-command; and the venerable official accordingly passed alone into the chamber.

The Daughter of Glory was seated in a profoundly pensive mood, her hand-

maidens standing near and contemplating her with the most melancholy interest. She was clad in a negligent undress; and her long, luxuriant, shining hair rolled in unconfined masses over her naked shoulders of dazzling whiteness and floated down her back far below the waist. A strange light shone in her eyes—a light more intense, more sinister, and more penetrating, than ever her dependents had observed before; and the supernal brilliancy of which shone all the more ominously on account of the extreme pallor of her countenance. It was evident that some scheme of vital import occupied her mind, and that she was not only balancing all the immediate chances of failure or success, but likewise plunging her mental looks with eager intentness into the future, in order to discern and calculate the results to which her project might lead.

But when the door opened and the magistrate entered, the Daughter of Glory immediately guessed from his venerable appearance who he was; and rising from her chair, she received him with a demeanor that was respectful, graceful, and composed.

'Lady,' said the old man, who was moved even to tears at the thought that one so transcendently lovely, and so full of all the charms of feminine witchery and fascination, could possibly be so deeply, deeply criminal,—'lady, is it really true that you have avowed yourself the perpetrator of a deed which the imagination shudders to connect with a being of your appearance?'

'That this hand dealt the blow, worshipful sir,' responded Gloria, extending her right arm as she spoke, 'is most true, and I proclaim myself the murderess in order that suspicion should not fall upon the innocent. Else had it been easy for me to secure my safety by flight.'

'But the provocation must have been immense, lady, which could have urged one of your tender age and elevated mind to the commission of such a deed!' said the magistrate, in a gentle tone of inquiry.

'Oh! the provocation was diabolical!' ejaculated Gloria, with a strong emphasis

'It must have been great indeed,' said the weeping Linda, 'to have impelled our dear mistress to such an extreme.'

'Oh! sir, do her no harm—spare her!' implored Beatrice, the tears streaming down her countenance also.

'Young maiden, your attachment to your mistress does *you* honor, and speaks much in *her* favor,' observed the magistrate. 'But it is not for me to spare nor yet to harm; a higher authority will patiently, laboriously, and impartially investigate the case and deal with it accordingly. In the meantime, lady,' he added, turning his eyes upon Gloria, 'you must prepare to accompany me.'

'So soon?' she exclaimed. 'Ah! most worshipful sir, remove me not hence for a few hours.'

'But upon what ground do you demand this delay?' inquired the magistrate. 'Give me some good reason, and I shall not harshly refuse the favor which you seem to require at my hands.'

'Oh! what can be a better reason than this,' exclaimed Gloria, 'that I have an appointment to meet a near and very dear relative at this hostel to-day; indeed, the only relative that I possess in the world; and unless I be allowed to remain here to keep that appointment, I may never see her more.'

'And this relative of whom you are speaking?' said the magistrate, inquiringly.

'My sister, sir—my sister,' answered Gloria, her eyes filling with tears.

'But her name—who is she?' asked the magistrate. 'For all these particulars am I bound to record in my official report to the chief judge of the district.'

'She is known by the name of Satanais,' replied Gloria.

'Satanais! what, the mysterious and romantic lady, who owns the guardianship of the glorious John Zitzka, the Captain-General of the Taborites?' exclaimed the magistrate, now contemplating Gloria with enhanced curiosity, interest, and pity.

'I am indeed the unfortunate sister of that self-same Satanais,' returned Gloria.

'Then, great as already was my sympathy towards you, lady,' said the venerable official, 'it is now augmented a hundred-fold; for I am well aware that the Taborite warriors revere and honor your sister Satanais; and for her sake, therefore, will I do all that lies in my power to serve you.'

'A thousand thanks, kind sir, for this generosity on your part,' exclaimed Gloria. 'The only favor I have to demand at your hands is to be permitted to remain here for three or four hours longer, so that I may not miss the appointment which my beloved sister gave

me some days back for this very forenoon, and at this place.'

'The boon is granted, lady,' said the magistrate; 'and I will command the sentinel in the passage to permit free and uninterrupted ingress and egress to any one visiting you during your sojourn here.'

Having thus spoken, the magistrate bowed and withdrew.

But scarcely had the door closed behind him when an expression of indescribable joy and triumph appeared upon the countenance of the Daughter of Glory; and turning towards Linda and Beatrice, she said in a tone of exultation, 'Now, my faithful handmaidens, give me your attention while I hastily explain to you the course which I am about to pursue.'

CHAPTER LVII.

THE FIRST SENTINEL.

It is not necessary that we should pause to detail the conversation which now took place between Gloria and her faithful attendants: suffice it to say that whatever were the nature of the explanations or instructions given by the guilty lady to those charming handmaidens, the latter not only approved of the plan proposed, but lost no time in lending their aid to its furtherance.

The whole matter having been fully discussed in whispering voices, Linda proceeded to knock at the chamber-door, which was secured outside by a bolt. The Taborite sentinel who was stationed in the passage, instantly opened the door; and on beholding Linda, he said, 'Good morning to thee, fair maiden.'

'Do you know me, good friend?' inquired the damsel.

'He who has seen thy pretty face cannot easily forget it,' was the response, delivered in a tone of perfect good nature, and not of coarse gallantry. 'The same may be said of thy sister Beatrice,' added the soldier. 'But how happens it that you are company with the lady whom I am appointed to guard?' he demanded, his voice sinking to a whisper.

'Are you not aware that the Lady Gloria is the sister of the Lady Satanais?' asked Linda, likewise speaking in a low tone, and closing the door behind her.

'Methought that I overheard the magistrate telling some such tale to my commanding officer just now, when his worship came out of the chamber,' said the Taborite sentinel: 'but as they walked rapidly away together along the passage, I could not catch any explicit details, and therefore I fancied I must have been mistaken in the little that I did hear—especially as I never before heard even a hint to the effect that the Lady Satanais had a sister at all.'

'It is true, notwithstanding,' said Linda. 'But where was it that you first became acquainted with me and my sister by sight?'

'I belonged to the army that was encamped a few weeks ago in the wood about a day's journey hence,' answered the soldier; 'and often and often have I seen you and Beatrice in attendance upon the Lady Satanais of an evening, when she was wont to recline upon the green sward in front of the Captain-General's pavilion. But when the army suddenly broke up its encampment to make a forced march to Prague at the time the Council of the Aristocracy was about to assemble, I was left, amongst others, to garrison the neighboring town and occupy this district. And now that I have answered your questions, fair maiden, do you in return give me some particulars of this most mysterious—most unfortunate affair.'

'You are already acquainted with the outline of the tragic story, no doubt,' said Linda, 'and I have little more to tell you, unless it be that my dear mistress received an insult amounting to an intolerable provocation at the hands of Ermach.'

'You speak of the Lady Gloria as your mistress,' observed the Taborite sentinel, 'have you, then, left the service of the Lady Satanais, whom you declare to be her sister?'

'Yes, Beatrice and I are now attached to the Lady Gloria,' answered Linda, 'and you may conceive how cruelly our feelings are tried by the dreadful events which have occurred.'

'Oh! I can well imagine how profoundly you must have been shocked, fair maiden,' said the Taborite. 'But this Lady Gloria, does she at all resemble her sister Satanais?'

'You shall judge for yourself, good friend,' said Linda, 'I will return into the chamber under pretence of fetching something which I had forgotten, and I will leave the door wide open so that

you may obtain a complete view of your prisoner.'

'Thanks!' exclaimed the Taborite,—'it is indeed necessary that I should become acquainted with her person, especially as the magistrate has ordered me to allow free ingress and egress to every one save and except the Lady Gloria herself.'

'Ah! his worship has given you those instructions?' observed Linda. 'He is a good, kind, benevolent old man. But now keep your eyes in readiness, for I am about to re-enter the chamber.'

Thus speaking, Linda threw the door wide open, tripped lightly back into the room, exchanged rapid glances of deep meaning with the Daughter of Glory; and, having taken her handkerchief from the toilette-table, hurried back again into the passage, closing the door again behind her.

This little scene occupied a minute, during which the Taborite soldier plunged his eager eyes intently into the chamber and obtained a full view of the beauteous Gloria as she sate upon her chair while Beatrice was combing out that luxuriant mass of golden hair which seemed to catch and imprison the rays that the morning sun poured through the open casement.

'Well, now are you satisfied?' demanded Linda, pausing in the passage to continue her discourse with the Taborite sentinel.

'Oh! what transcendent loveliness!' exclaimed the man, speaking with all the enthusiastic sincerity of extreme wonderment mingled with a species of unknown pleasure; then, as a sudden expression of mournfulness appeared upon his honest countenance, he said, 'But who could have fancied, who could believe that such a woman is capable of such a deed?'

'Ah! judge her not harshly, until you are acquainted with all the circumstances of this most lamentable and heart-rending case,' exclaimed Linda, in a tone of earnest entreaty. 'But tell me,' she said, with a sudden alteration of tone and manner,—'tell me whether you think there is any resemblance between the Lady Gloria and the Lady Satanais?'

'Resemblance!' echoed the Taborite, who was about to declare in a positive tone that there was not the slightest similitude between the sisters; but instantly checking himself, he began to compare in his own mind his reminiscences of Satanais with the impressions which had just been made upon him by Gloria; and, after a few minutes' profound meditation, he said, 'In one sense there is a remarkable resemblance; and in another there is the widest distinction possible. The resemblance exists in the outline of the features, the stature, the shape, and the glorious eyes; but the difference is in the complexion and the hair. Yes, it is easy to perceive that they are sisters; but one appears to be the child of darkness, and the other the child of light.'

'Are they not called the Daughter of Satan and the Daughter of Glory?' said Linda, in a tone of deep solemnity.

'Ah! is your present mistress denominated the Daughter of Glory?' exclaimed the Taborite; then, after the pause of nearly a minute, he added,—'Yes, in beauty is she assuredly the child of heaven; but, if we may judge by the deed of the past night, she must in her soul be the child of hell.'

'Have I not besought you to forbear from prejudgment?' demanded Linda, reproachfully.

'True, maiden,' answered the soldier, 'but the circumstances of the case force from me these remarks even against my will.'

'You should endeavor to be more merciful and more just,' observed Linda. 'But tell me, good friend, how long you will have to keep your turn on duty in this passage?'

'In another hour I shall be relieved by one of my comrades,' replied the soldier. 'But wherefore that question?'

'Simply through a passing sentiment of curiosity,' answered Linda. 'You will, however, explain to your successor on this post how different the Lady Gloria is from her sister Satanais, for I cannot undertake to throw open the room door to afford a full view of my unfortunate mistress, every time a fresh sentinel is placed on guard in this spot.'

'Assuredly not, fair maiden,' said the Taborite, 'nor would it be proper thus to expose the Lady Gloria to annoyance, for we must all pity her for her sister's sake, if not for her own. I shall, therefore, tell my comrade who comes next, that every one is to pass out and in this chamber, except such-and-such a lady whom I shall describe to him, for it will not be a very difficult thing to give a description of the Lady Gloria to any one who has ever seen the Lady Satanais, as all my companions have.'

'And how shall you word this fine description of yours? asked Linda, who had gradually assumed the tone and manner of a familiar but harmless chit-chat.

'I shall tell my comrade who comes to relieve me,' replied the soldier, 'that if he can only fancy the Lady Satanais with golden hair and a complexion as white as a lily, he will then have the Lady Gloria in his mind's eye to perfection.'

'Good!' ejaculated Linda. 'Mind you do not fail to impress this explanation upon the understanding of your comrade, whoever he may be.'

And having thus spoken, Linda hurried along the passage to the chamber which she and Beatrice had occupied until they were summoned in the middle of the night,—or rather at so early an hour in the morning, to attend upon their guilty mistress.

In a few minutes, she retraced her steps with some articles of apparel in her hand; and, having paused to exchange a few more friendly observations with the sentinel, she re-entered the chamber of the Daughter of Glory.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SECOND SENTINEL.

An hour elapsed; and at the expiration of this interval the guard was relieved in the usual manner, just as if the ceremony were being performed in a fortified city or an encampment.

Scarcely had the second sentinel thus assumed his post at the door of Gloria's chamber, when Linda issued forth again into the passage; but she instantaneously closed the door behind her.

'My respects to you, maiden,' said the Taborite, with that half-familiarity of tone and manner which showed that he was claiming the renewal of an acquaintance that had previously existed.

'Ah! is it you, Gondibert?' exclaimed Linda, instantly recognising the soldier, whom she also knew by name,—and with a secret feeling of satisfaction at the circumstance of the second sentinel being thus an old acquaintance, she said, 'The last time I saw you was when you mounted guard at the entrance of the Lady Satanais' tent in the wood where we were encamped a few weeks ago.'

'And since that period I have belonged to the garrison of the adjacent market-town,' observed Gondibert. 'But although I am well pleased to meet you again, fair maiden, yet I am grieved that it should be under such circumstances as the present. And you may perhaps be surprised when I assure you that never until this day did I dream of the Lady Satanais having a sister.'

'Indeed!' ejaculated Linda. 'I suppose that the sentinel who was on duty just now has been gossiping with you on the subject.'

'Well, he certainly paused for a few minutes to discourse with me,' said Gondibert. 'But this was in some degree necessary, you know, inasmuch as the sentry going off guard invariably gives the countersign and any other particulars of importance to the soldier relieving him. And if we had not spoken a word or two concerning the Lady Gloria, how should I have known anything about the prisoner whose escape it is my duty to prevent?'

'True,' observed Linda, apparently struck by the force of these observations. 'And I suppose that your predecessor here on duty did not forget to inform you that the Lady Satanais is even now with her sister the Lady Gloria?'

'The Lady Satanais here!' exclaimed Gondibert, gazing upon Linda with the most unfeigned astonishment. 'Indeed I received no such information; but I heard it stated down stairs, before I came up to relieve guard, that Satanais was expected in the course of the forenoon, and it was in consequence of an appointment which she had made with her sister that the latter was permitted to remain here a few hours longer, instead of being immediately removed to the nearest gaol.'

'Yes, this delay was accorded by the worthy magistrate,' said Linda. 'But I do not think that my poor mistress will remain another hour beneath this roof, inasmuch as her sister arrived earlier than was originally expected.'

'And the Lady Satanais is here now?' exclaimed Gondibert, interrogatively.

'I have already told you so,' returned Linda.

'It is singular that I did not hear of her arrival down stairs just now,' observed the sentinel. 'But it might have happened when I was in the stable attending to my horse——'

'Very probably,' said Linda. 'But what really surprises me is, that your predecessor on guard in this passage

did not acquaint you with the fact, seeing that he beheld the Lady Satanais pass him and even saluted her with his halberd.'

'Perhaps he did mention the circumstance,' said Gondibert; 'and I might have overlooked it, or misunderstood him. However, since you tell me that the Lady Satanais has arrived, of course it must be so. May I inquire whether the interview of the sisters was very affecting?'

'The Lady Gloria loves the Lady Satanais as dearly as her own self,' replied Linda; 'and you may therefore judge whether the meeting was likely to be a tender one or not. Besides, only consider the circumstances—the awful circumstances——'

'Alas! yes,' observed Gondibert, in a musing tone. 'The Lady Gloria has placed herself in a most awful dilemma, and all the interest which her sister may possess with the Captain-General will not save her. For John Zitzka is not the man to turn aside the course of justice from its proper and legitimate channel. A stern and rigorous administration of the laws forms part of the system of the mighty Chief of Mount Tabor.'

'Oh! but there may be extenuating circumstances in favor of my poor mistress,' said Linda; 'and Zitzka is merciful and generous, as well as just and impartial.'

'God send that your mistress may be enabled to prove a provocation commensurate with the vengeance inflicted,' observed Gondibert. 'It would be terrible for one so young and beautiful to perish by the hand of the headsman.'

'Terrible indeed!' ejaculated Linda, shuddering from head to foot at the bare idea of such a tremendous catastrophe.

'Ah! poor girl, you are naturally afflicted by this tragic occurrence,' said Gondibert, in a tone of unfeigned commiseration; for, like the first sentinel, he possessed a kind and generous heart. 'Is the Lady Gloria older or younger than her sister?' he inquired, after a few moments' pause.

'They are twins,' responded Linda.

'Twins! and yet so different in their style of beauty!' exclaimed Gondibert.

'How know you aught on this subject?' inquired Linda, 'since you were not even aware until to-day that the Lady Satanais had a sister?'

'Are you not already aware that the comrade whom I just now relieved gave me certain information respecting your mistress?' exclaimed the Taborite.—'Well, and do you suppose he forgot to tell me that he obtained a full view of the Lady Gloria, when the door of her chamber was opened by one of her handmaidens?'

'I forgot at the moment that it was necessary for you to have at least some personal acquaintance with the prisoner whom you are guarding,' said Linda. 'At the same time, it is ridiculous to suppose that my mistress would attempt to escape; she, who voluntarily proclaimed the damning fact which has made her a captive.'

'My dear young maiden,' said Gondibert, leaning upon his halberd, 'I do not myself fancy that the Lady Gloria would for a single moment dream of flight, after having been her own accuser. But I am here to perform a particular duty, and not to make conjectures nor indulge in surmises, much less to trust to probabilities and chances. Therefore, as it is my part to prevent the escape of the prisoner, I should have been compelled to ascertain by my own ocular testimony, the exact personal appearance of the Lady Gloria, if my comrade had not been kind and considerate enough to give me such a description of her as enables me to dispense with that ceremony. And I am the better pleased that it should have been so, inasmuch as it would grieve me to force my way into the poor lady's presence, with the brutal intimation that I had come to have a good long look at her, in order that I might know her again. And now, Linda, do you consider it to have been all mere idle gossip and chit-chat between me and the worthy Taborite whom I relieved?'

'Pardon me, good Gondibert,' exclaimed the handmaiden, 'if for a single moment I should have appeared to treat with levity or disrespect any portion of your conduct. I appreciate, on my unfortunate mistress's behalf, all the kind consideration of your comrade and yourself; and I shall not fail to mention the same to the Lady Satanais, in order that she may report your generous behaviour to the Captain-General when she sees him again. But since you are acquainted, at least by description, with the personal appearance of the Lady Gloria, I do not wonder at your remark upon the contrast which her style of beauty presents to that of the Lady Satanais.'

'I can assure you that the soldier whom I just now relieved, was highly

poetical in the description which he gave me of that contrast,' observed Gondibert. with a smile. 'He told me that if I could fancy the Lady Satanais with shining yellow hair, instead of her own raven tresses, and a complexion of milk and roses, instead of her own transparent olive skin, then should I have formed the perfect ideal of the Lady Gloria.'

'And such is indeed the truth,' observed Linda, searcely able to suppress an arch smile.

At this moment the door of the chamber was partly opened, and Beatrice looked forth into the passage.

'Come, Linda,' she said, in a low and hurried tone, 'the Lady Satanais is about to take her departure for Prague, in order to throw herself at the feet of the Captain-General, and implore his mercy on behalf of our beloved mistress; but before she leaves, she wishes to give you certain instructions.'

'I will not keep her ladyship waiting a moment,' said Linda, and she forthwith hurried back into the chamber.

Gondibert, the Taborite sentinel, then resumed his walk to and fro outside the door of that apartment.

In a few minutes Linda and Beatrice both came forth, weeping bitterly; and, carefully closing the door behind them, they were moving slowly along the passage, when Gondibert accosted them, saying, 'Pardon me for intruding upon your grief, gentle damsels; but may I ask if any fresh cause of sorrow has transpired?'

'Is there not already sufficient to rend our hearts?' murmured Linda, in a voice broken by sobs; then, regaining her self-possession by a great effort, she said, 'The sisters are bidding each other farewell, perhaps for ever; and their grief was too sacred to be regarded even by the eyes of ourselves, who are devoted to them. We accordingly retired, and in a few minutes the Lady Satanais will go forth from that chamber where she is now weeping over her broken-hearted sister.'

'May all good saints prosper the mission of the Lady Satanais to Prague!' exclaimed Gondibert, with a fervor that came from his very soul; 'and may the mighty Zitzka listen favorably to the intercession which she will offer up to him!'

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door of the chamber was opened abruptly—and the Daughter of Satan came forth!

Yes, Satanais! attired in that picturesque raiment in which she was clad when we first introduced her to our readers—the tight jacket of purple velvet, open at the bosom and laced with scarlet ribands, the crimson petticoat reaching just below the knees, and the various colored ribands twined round the the admirably-formed legs.

A deep, deep sorrow sate upon her countenance, but the traces of her tears and of her more violent grief had disappeared.

The instant she emerged into the passage, she closed the door behind her, and with a graceful inclination acknowledged the salute of the Taborite soldier, who lowered his halberd in profound respect for that mysterious being who had obtained the love and the admiration of all the adherents of John Zitzka.

'Farewell, good and faithful maidens, said Satanais, pausing for a moment thus to address Linda and Beatrice. 'I go hence to Prague to obtain the pardon of my beloved Sister, your unhappy mistress. Return to her—hasten back into her presence, and afford her all your most tender consolations; for she is deeply—oh! too deeply afflicted.'

'Farewell, dear lady,' said Linda, kissing the hand of Satanais.

'May all good angels attend upon thee!' murmured Beatrice, as she likewise pressed to her lips the hand of the Danghter of Satan.

'Once more farewell, dear maidens,' said the lady, in a low and tremulous tone; then, turning away from Linda and Beatrice, she accosted Gondibert, to whom she spoke as follows: 'Kind-hearted follower of John Zitzka, I have heard from one of these maidens enough to induce me to mention thy name in honorable terms to the Captain-General. Rest well assured that thou shalt not be forgotten.'

'God speed thy mission to Prague, gracious lady,' said Gondibert, considerably affected; 'and may thy sister be relieved from the perils which now surround her.'

'Yes—oh! yes, she will soon be saved from all danger,' exclaimed Satanais, the glorious light which shone in her large black eyes suddenly becoming so overpoweringly resplendent that Gondidibert was compelled to cast down his looks, so dazzling and so bewildering was that preternatural lustre.

To his ears was then wafted the word 'Farewell,' which was breathed in the rich melodious tones of that lady whose voice seemed like the sounds of a golden

flute; and raising his eyes, he beheld her graceful form retreating rapidly down the long passage towards a staircase communicating with the back part of the hostel.

In the meantime, Linda and Beatrice had re-entered Gloria's chamber, the door of which they carefully closed behind them.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PARLOR AT THE INN.

While these incidents were taking place in one part of the hostel, the magistrate and the Taborite lieutenant had been refreshing themselves with an excellent repast in another; and when their meal was concluded, the officer repaired to the stables to see that the horses of his troop were properly cared for, while the magistrate proceeded to introduce himself to Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela.

The knight and the forest-maiden had already received through the landlord a message from the magistrate, requesting them to delay the resumption of their journey until he had seen them; and they were consequently prepared for the visit which the venerable functionary now paid them, in the parlor where they had been conversing together on the awful tragedy of the past night.

Sir Ernest de Colmar received the magistrate with the respect due alike to his official capacity and his gray hairs; and Angela bowed her plumed head as the old man advanced into the room. He acknowledged with a dignified affability the reception thus given him; and taking a seat, he observed, 'I am sorry to have delayed you on your journey, worthy travellers; but the unhappy occurrence which has brought me to this inn, compels me to ask you a few questions ere you proceed on your way.'

'We shall respond to them readily, most worshipful sir,' returned de Colmar; 'and we beg you to believe that we are both as profoundly amazed as we are deeply afflicted at the incident to which you have alluded.'

'I make no doubt that such are your feelings,' observed the magistrate; then, drawing forth his tablets, he said—'Your name, I believe, is Sir Ernest de Colmar, and you are an Austrian knight?'

'Such are my style and condition,' answered our hero.

'And the name and rank of your travelling companion?' said the magistrate, with a glance of inquiry towards Angela. 'I have not been enabled to glean those particulars from the landlord.'

'My comrade, most worshipful sir,' De Colmar hastened to observe, for he perceived that a serious cause of embarrassment had suddenly arisen in respect to his own deliverer—'my comrade has most grave and important reasons for concealing his name, and as there cannot be the shadow of a suspicion against him in respect to the tragedy of last night, your worship will not, I hope, see any necessity for the exercise of your authority in a manner that may prove disagreeable to him.'

'The moment that a man refuses to reveal himself to the functionaries of justice, a suspicion attaches to him,' observed the magistrate. 'In confidence, at all events, and under the pledge of secrecy on my part, can your companion mention his name, which doubtless is no secret to your excellency.'

'I can solemnly assure your worship,' returned De Colmar, emphatically, 'that I am as ignorant as yourself of everything which concerns the personal identity and social position of my companion. But this much I am proud to proclaim, that he is as brave and generous-hearted, as chivalrous and as enterprising as a warrior of the strictest honor and probity can possibly be.'

'All this is likely enough,' said the magistrate, in a cold and even severe tone; 'but I have a certain duty to perform——'

'Your worship's duty,' interrupted De Colmar, 'does not compel you to extort from wayfarers and travellers those revelations and avowals which may be disagreeable to their feelings or prejudicial to their interests.'

'Sir Ernest de Colmar,' said the magistrate, in a still more severe tone, 'a murder has been committed within these walls and by a lady who arrived here in company with yourself and your stranger,' he added, glancing towards Angela, who was leaning against the frame-work of the casement. 'The causes of this black deed are involved in the deepest mystery, and it behoves me, as the functionary of justice, to investigate the whole affair to the utmost of my ability. I therefore seek from the

travelling companions of the self-accusing lady all such testimony as they may be enabled to afford; and in thus placing them in the position of witnesses, I am bound to learn who and what they are. Once more, therefore, do I demand the name, style, and rank of yon stranger in the bright armor and with the closed vizor.'

'Permit me to observe,' said Angela, who had hitherto remained silent because she hoped and believed that De Colmar would be enabled to dissuade the magistrate from his purpose of extorting the revelation of her name—'permit me to observe,' she said, advancing slowly from the casement, and rendering her voice as masculine as possible, 'that I am utterly unacquainted with any motives which could have led the Lady Gloria to the perpetration of a deed which has filled me with amazement, horror, and compassion—yes, compassion, I say, on behalf of the unhappy criminal who must either have received a tremendous provocation, or else have been assailed with a sudden aberration of the intellect.'

'You speak well, young sir,' exclaimed the magistrate; for that you *are* a mere youth, your voice fully proves. Now believe me, when I declare that I do not wish to wound your feelings nor prejudice your interests, as Sir Ernest de Colmar has denominated the alternatives attendant on the revelation of your name; but that revelation must be made in confidence to me, and you may write the particulars in my tablets with your own hand.'

'Be it so,' exclaimed Angela, much to the astonishment of Sir Ernest de Colmar, who naturally wondered wherefore his deliverer could make such a revelation to the magistrate and not to himself.

But scarcely had those words fallen from Angela's lips and created this sentiment of surprise in our hero's mind, when the landlord entered the room and whispered something in the ears of the magistrate.

'I crave your indulgence for a few minutes,' said the venerable functionary, addressing himself to De Colmar and Angela; and, with this apology for leaving them, he quitted the room, followed by the landlord.

'Some peril menaces me' exclaimed Angela, the instant the door had closed behind them, 'a presentiment of evil has struck upon my mind. Doubtless I have been traced by Zitzka's emissaries; and the release of the State Prisoners will yet be the cause of serious embarrassments for me!'

'Whatever be the danger which may overtake you,' replied De Colmar, 'you should place implicit faith in the strength of my friendship——'

'Oh! I understand full well, Sir Knight,' interrupted Angela, with an almost passionate vehemence, 'what is passing in your mind. You are astonished—nay, you are even piqued and hurt, at my conduct in agreeing to make to the magistrate that revelation which I withhold from you. But, ah! be not offended with me on that account, for you cannot comprehend my motives now; and the time will soon come when I shall be enabled to explain them——'

'Think not that I am vexed at your conduct in this respect,' interrupted De Colmar, in a soothing and reassuring tone. 'I have received such unmistakeable proofs of your good feeling towards me, that I am incapable of harboring an unworthy thought concerning you. Surprised I was—annoyed I was not——'

At this moment the door was again opened, and the magistrate followed by the Taborite officer, entered the room. But ere the latter closed the door behind him, both De Colmar and Angela caught sight of the glittering halberds of several soldiers who had remained outside.

'This is your prisoner!' exclaimed the magistrate, addressing himself to the officer, but pointing towards Angela.

And as these words rang through the apartment, the forest-maiden laid her hand upon her sword, while that of Sir Ernest de Colmar flew at once from its sheath.

'Forbear from violence!' cried the venerable official, in a tone of mingled entreaty and command. 'Out of consideration for one of your knightly rank, Sir Ernest De Colmar, I had resolved to effect the arrest of your travelling-companion with as little ceremony and publicity as possible; but if you compel us to resort to violence, remember that we have an overwhelming force to back us.'

'His worship speaks truly,' said Angela, 'not a drop of blood shall be shed on my account. I therefore surrender myself prisoner to this Taborite officer——'

'But in the first place,' ejaculated De

Colmar, with vehement interruption,—'let us be made acquainted with the cause of this sudden proceeding which has been adopted towards you:' and the knight still retained his naked weapon in his hand, for it would require some more substantial, or rather some weightier reason, than the mere menace of numerical superiority to deter the heroic warrior from defending his brave deliverer by force of arms.

'Listen, then!' exclaimed the magistrate, glancing at the contents of a paper which he drew from the bosom of his doublet. 'Three State Prisoners have been rescued from the Castle of Prague. The individual who accomplished this act of treason towards the Taborite Government, was clad in a suit of armor which exactly corresponds with one that has since been missed from the armory of the castle.—The sentinel who was on guard over the prisoners at the time, gave the description and furnished the details which prove that the treacherous offender was so clad in that polished suit. Messengers have been despatched from Prague in all directions, bearing the requisite information and authority for his capture; and one of these emissaries has just arrived at the hostel. Now, therefore, I have been explicit in the matter—and let me hope that no resistance will be shown to a proceeding which I am resolved and able to enforce.'

'You can only make this youth your prisoner by passing over my body,' exclaimed De Colmar, placing himself at the same time in front of Angela Wildon.

'Then must we summon the assistance which is at hand!' cried the magistrate, turning towards the door.

'Stop!' ejaculated the Taborite officer, all on a sudden struck by something which made him thus give utterance to that authoritative monosyllable; and, seizing the magistrate bo the sleeve of his doublet, he made him turn away from the door on the latch of which his hand was already placed.

'Wherefore do you thus stop me in the performance of my duty?' demanded the venerable functionary, surveying the Taborite lieutenant with mingled anger and astonishment.

'Behold!' exclaimed the latter, whose eyes were fixed upon Sir Ernest de Colmar, as the brave knight stood with upraised sword in front of Angela Wildon.

'Ah!' cried the magistrate, his own looks now suddenly catching the same object on which those of the officer were already rivetted.

Then, with the vividness of an inspiration, did the truth flash to the brain of Sir Ernest de Colmar; and, flourishing his sword in a peculiar manner, he caused the ring which he had received from John Zitzka to gleam before the eyes of the magistrate and the officer.

This movement was too significant on his part to be mistaken by those functionaries; and their looks, quitting the ring at the same moment, met with an expression of indescribable bewilderment.

'What course are we to pursue?' whispered the officer, drawing the magistrate aside.

'There is but one course,' was the prompt reply; 'the talisman worn by the Austrian is paramount above all written warrants, mandates, or decrees.'

'Such likewise is my opinion,' rejoined the officer.

This hurried conference only occupied a minute, during which, however, the forest maiden's looks wandered, through the bars of her vizor, with ineffable amazement from the countenance of the magistrate to that of the officer, and thence to Sir Ernest de Colmar, who had now abandoned his menacing attitude, and was lounging negligently against the wall—for he saw that Zitzka's ring had indeed produced a talismanic effect. And in his features Angela read so much encouragement that she felt a sudden relief, though she was still lost in astonishment at the change which had thus been operated as if by magic, and all in a moment, in her favor.

'Sir Ernest de Colmar,' said the magistrate, advancing towards the knight, after that brief and whispered conference with the officer,—'am I to understand that your excellency forbids the arrest of the armed unknown who has committed so grave an act of treachery against the mighty Zitzka?'

'I certainly forbid a proceeding against which I was resolved to do battle until the last extremity,' was De Colmar's prompt reply.

"But has your Excellency reflected well upon so serious an interference with the regular march of justice?" demanded the magistrate.

"My resolution is not te be shaken in that respect," rejoined the Knight.

"Then all responsibility is removed

from my shoulders,' said the venerable functionary; 'and I bow with submission and respect to that secret influence which is paramount. Officer, command your men to retire.'

'Your worship's commands shall be obeyed,' returned the Taborite lieutenant; and he quitted the apartment.

'I have now to request,' said the magistrate, glancing first at Angela, and then fixing his eyes upon De Colmar, 'that you will resume your journey as speedily as possible; for I do not feel that justice can take its proper course, nor flow in its usual channel, so long as it is subjected to such an influence as that, which even the mighty Zitzka will himself deplore, and which he assuredly never could have foreseen.'

De Colmar was about to make some reply, when the Taborite officer returned to the room.

'May it please your worship,' he said, addressing himself to the magistrate, 'I have just heard from one of my men that the Lady Satanais has visited her sister and has taken her departure; and we may therefore now proceed to the removal of our prisoner.'

'Yes, there is no longer any cause for delay,' responded the venerable functionary.

'The Lady Satanais!' ejaculated De Colmar, now recovering from the stupor of ineffable wonderment into which he was at first thrown by the intelligence that the Daughter of Satan had visited the inn. 'Is it possible that she has been here?'

'Not ten minutes have elapsed since she took her departure,' replied the officer.

'I must see the Lady Gloria—I must see her alone for a few moments!' exclaimed De Colmar. 'But it will be only consistent with propriety if your worship would request her to grant me an interview, which, under present circumstances, may prove painful to her.'

'I will repair at once to the prisoner's chamber,' said the magistrate, 'and ascertain whether she will see you for a few minutes, previous to her departure hence.'

And the old man quitted the room, the officer remaining till his return, in order to see whether any farther delay was to take place ere the removal of the Lady Glory to the prison of the adjacent market-town.

During the temporary absence of the magistrate, Sir Ernest de Colmar fell into a deep reverie; and Angela, from whose bosom a profound sigh had escaped, when she witnessed the emotion he had experienced at the mention of the Daughter of Satan's name, and of her visit to the inn,—the gentle Angela, we say, contemplated the knight with profound and mournful interest from behind the bars of her steel burgonet.

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and the magistrate made his appearance in a state of alarming excitement, and leading in Beatrice and Linda, each of whom he grasped tightly by the wrist.

But upon the countenance of the handmaidens there was an expression of ineffable triumph mingled with joy; and it was evident that they cared little or nothing for any peril which might seem to menace themselves.

'What, in heaven's name, is the matter?' demanded the Taborite officer, impatiently.

'Our prisoner—the Lady Gloria—has fled!' exclaimed the magistrate, in a tone of wrathful excitement; 'the murderess has escaped!'

CHAPTER LX.

LINDA AND BEATRICE.—THE JOURNEY CONTINUED.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of the Taborite officer and Angela Wildon; and the sensation thus produced by the intelligence of Gloria's flight prevented any one from observing that Sir Ernest de Colmar had not manifested a kindred feeling of surprise; for, as the reader cannot fail to bear in mind, the knight was in a measure prepared for some such announcement as that which had just been made.

The magistrate, forcing Linda and Beatrice into the room, closed the door, exclaiming, 'This affair must be investigated to the very bottom, and those who have assisted the guilty woman in evading the grasp of justice, shall assuredly meet with condign punishment.'

'But has your worship adopted any measures to recapture the fugitive?' inquired the Taborite lieutenant.

'No, forsooth!' ejaculated the old functionary. 'The sudden discovery of the prisoner's flight so bewildered all my ideas that I thought not of such a proceeding.'

'I will, then, at once despatch my troopers in all directions,' said the of-

ficer; 'and we will do our best to retake the fugitive.'

'One moment!' cried the magistrate, detaining the officer as he was about to quit the room. 'Have the kindness to send hither those men who have performed the part of sentinels in respect to the Lady Gloria; for it is necessary that I should not only receive their testimony, but likewise ascertain whether they be in any way implicated in her flight.'

'Your instructions shall be duly attended to,' replied the lieutenant; and with these words he hastened from the room.

For a few minutes there was a profound silence in that apartment; but at length the magistrate, addressing himself to Linda and Beatrice, said in a tone of mingled menace and reproach, 'Have you well reflected, young maidens, that by persisting in a refusal to give any account of the means by which your mistress escaped, you are only aggravating the offence of your complicity and connivance therein?'

'Not from any motives of disrespect towards your worship, are we thus silent,' observed Linda, in a mild but firm tone.

'Nor would we have your worship believe that we experience any improper or unworthy feeling in reference to the dreadful deed which has caused so much affliction and excitement,' added Beatrice. 'Profoundly do we deplore the appalling tragedy—but at the same time we are convinced that, were the truth fully known, immense extenuation would be discovered on behalf of our unfortunate mistress.'

'And is the truth thus fully known to you?' inquired the magistrate, his tone and manner relaxing in their severity: for he was naturally of a kind disposition, and when the first feelings of anger were somewhat subdued, he could not help experiencing a sentiment of admiration with regard to the fidelity and devotedness of the two damsels towards their mistress.

'The circumstances attendant upon the deplorable tragedy are all unknown to us,' said Beatrice, in answer to the query put by the venerable functionary: 'but we imagine ourselves to be sufficiently acquainted with our beloved mistress to justify the positive averment that no human patience nor endurance could have remained proof against the provocation afforded by the page who thus invoked by his own conduct a terrible chastisement.'

While Beatrice was yet speaking, the Taborite officer returned to the parlor, followed by four of his soldiers. These were the men who had done duty as sentinels—two of them beneath the windows of Gloria's chamber, and two in the passage.

The magistrate proceeded to examine them; and it soon appeared that the two who had successively mounted guard under the casement, were totally unable to throw any light upon the subject. They were accordingly ordered to withdraw; and the magistrate then turned towards the Taborite who had performed the duty of first sentinel in the passage communicating with the chamber whence the Daughter of Glory had escaped.

This individual declared that he had some conversation with Linda relative to the two sisters, Satanais and Gloria; and he observed that the young maiden had purposely thrown open the door of the apartment to allow him an opportunity of obtaining a view of her mistress, affirmed most positively that to the best of his knowledge the Lady Satanais did not enter the chamber during the period that he was upon guard; but, upon being closely pressed by the magistrate, he would not undertake to swear upon his cross handled sword that Satanais could not possibly have glided unobserved into the room while he was discoursing with Linda.

Gondibert, the second sentinel, was next examined; and he deposed to the effect that a conversation had likewise taken place between him and Linda in respect to the Lady Satanais and the Lady Gloria: that in the course of this conversation, Linda had informed him that Satanais was at that very moment with her sister: that Linda had even appeared surprised that he had not received intelligence of this fact from the preceding sentinel; that he had seen Satanais come from the chamber, and that she had indeed spoken to him; but he would swear as a soldier, a man, and a Christian, that he had not seen Gloria emerge from the apartment, nor was it possible for her to have glided forth without being perceived by him.

The landlord and the landlady were now summoned to the room where this investigation was taking place; and they were equally unable to throw any light upon the mysterious escape of Gloria. The landlord declared that he had en-

countered Satanais at the foot of the staircase communicating with the back premises of the inn—that having seen her once before when the Taborite army passed that way, he immediately recognised her again—that he accordingly saluted her with deep respect—and that she, having gracefully acknowledged his courtesy, hurried away. He moreover observed that he stood watching her a few minutes; and that having traversed the garden at a rapid pace, she disappeared round the angle of the adjacent grove. He then hastened to communicate the circumstances to his wife; and it appeared that the worthy woman was somewhat astonished at the mystery attending this visit on the part of Satanais, whose arrival at the inn had been altogether unobserved and whose departure was effected by the back premises.

'The arrival of the lady may have passed unnoticed,' said the magistrate, 'because it is probable that she entered the establishment by the same way in which she ultimately quitted it; and it seems that her departure would have also taken place unobserved, had not the landlord been accidentally about to ascend that particular staircase at the time. That the Lady Satanais shunned observation and acted with studied precaution, is therefore evident,—for it would even appear that she must have arrived on foot——'

'Unless she had a horse concealed in the grove, your worship,' said the landlord.

'Likely enough, and perhaps another for the use of her sister,' remarked the Taborite officer. 'But I do not see that we are a whit nearer the elucidation of the mystery, than we were when your worship commenced the examination.

'I must frankly admit that such is the case,' observed the magistrate,—then, turning with a severe countenance towards Linda and Beatrice, he said, 'Young maidens, I would once more appeal to you whether it will not be well to make some revelation respecting the matter now before me.—By your obstinate silence you compromise the characters of others. For what view can I possibly take of the transaction according to its present complexion? Common sense tells me that one of these two sentinels must have been bribed to permit the Lady Gloria to escape from her apartment.'

'O Linda!' exclaimed Gondibert,—'you are well aware that I am innocent!'

'And you can testify in the same manner with regard to myself!' said the first sentinel, in a tone of mingled reproach and entreaty.

'Hear me, your worship,' cried Linda, with an air of decision and a voice of firmness, 'these men are innocent! Most solemnly do I swear that they are innocent! Nay, more, the very conversations which I held with them, and to which I have alluded, formed a portion of that studied plan whereby my beloved mistress was enabled to accomplish her escape. With me, then, rests all the blame—I alone am guilty ——'

'Nay, not you *alone*, sister,' said Beatrice, throwing herself upon Linda's bosom, 'for I was your accomplice, and I will share with you any penalties that may ensue.'

And the beauteous girls remained locked for a few moments in a fervent embrace, their tears bedewing each other's cheeks, but their eyes looking the sunshine of ineffable love and mutual devotedness through those pearly showers.

'Behold that touching spectacle!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, unable to curb his feelings any longer. 'Will your worship persist in the idea of punishing those amiable maidens,—mere girls as they are,—whose only fault is their extreme devotion to their mistress?'

'It grieves me to do aught that is harsh,' said the magistrate, himself deeply affected, 'but my duty compels me to treat these damsels as the accomplices in a grave offence against justice—and, therefore, I have no alternative ——'

But his worship stopped suddenly short, as he became aware of the fact that Sir Ernest de Colmar was purposely causing the talismanic ring upon his finger to reflect the rays which the sun cast through the window.

'Your excellency was about to make some observation?' said the venerable functionary, recovering his magisterial air of dignified calmness and veiling beneath this question the real cause of his sudden self-interruption.

'I was anxious to implore your forbearance and mercy on behalf of these damsels,' responded De Colmar, once more displaying the ring in a significant manner.

The magistrate and the Taborite

lieutenant exchanged rapid glances of intelligence, which were as much as to say that the Austrian knight was determined to use his secret talisman for the purpose of thwarting the ends of justice in every way, but that there was no alternative save to submit to the magic influence which thus amounted to an imperious necessity. At the same time, the magistrate did not choose to suffer the uninitiated to perceive *how* or *by whom* he was thus driven to the adoption of a course so opposite to the one which he had previously seemed determined to pursue; and therefore, assuming all the air of a man who is acting solely in obedience to his own impulses, he said, 'Young damsels, Sir Ernest de Colmar shall not prove himself the only individual present who compassionates the position in which you have placed yourselves. It would sorely grieve me to doom such artless and inexperienced maidens to the contamination of a gaol; and I, therefore, release you from custody on the payment of one ounce of gold as a fine to the established Government of Bohemia.'

'The decision of your worship commands alike admiration and gratitude,' said De Colmar; and throwing down a quantity of gold pieces upon the table, he exclaimed,—'Behold double the amount of the sum wherein these maidens are mulcted; and the surplussage your worship can devote to some charitable purpose.'

Linda and Beatrice both expressed their thanks to the venerable functionary for his lenient decision; and their heartfelt gratitude was then poured forth to Sir Ernest de Colmar for the generous interference he had exercised in their behalf.

The magistrate, the Taborite officer, the sentinels, the landlord, and the landlady now withdrew; and Sir Ernest de Colmar, Angela Wildon, and the two handmaidens remained together in the parlor of the hostel.

'Whither are you going, young damsels? and what course have ye been instructed by your mistress to pursue?' asked the knight.

'We have to entreat a continuation of your excellency's protection and escort, precisely the same as if our mistress were still with us,' was the answer given by Linda; 'and we have been assured that within twenty-four hours at the outside, not only shall we receive farther instructions, but that your excellency will likewise have some communication made to you.'

'Under these circumstances,' exclaimed De Colmar, 'let us continue our journey so soon as I have given orders for the decent interment of the luckless boy who met his death last night.'

The necessary arrangements for the murdered youth's funeral were accordingly made with the landlord; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon the travellers, consisting of the knight, Angela, the damsels, and the two grooms, recommenced their journey along the great southern road leading direct for the Bohemian frontier and towards the Duchy of Austria.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the party halted at another way-side inn; and having partaken of refreshments, the travellers retired to their respective chambers, with the intention of rising early to resume their journey.

Sleep did not, however, readily visit the eyes of Sir Ernest de Colmar, although he was well wearied both in body and mind. The recent adventures with Gloria haunted him like a band of evil spirits; and again and again did he deplore the destiny which had to such an extent linked certain circumstances of *his* life with those of her own romantic and spell-bound existence.

But as he lay in his sleepless couch reviewing all the incidents of the last four and twenty hours, he could not help dwelling with sentiments of mingled amazement and suspicion upon certain facts which were now uppermost in his memory.

For when Satanais had penetrated into his bed-chamber at the Golden Falcon, on the memorable night of his duel with the sable foeman of the heath, she had declared that she was about to proceed to her own far-off clime and that she had come to bid him farewell for ever! And yet she had this day re-appeared at a place only twelve hours' distance from the Bohemian capital. This was strange, unaccountable! Then again, Gloria had assured him during their ride on the previous day that she had received no intelligence of Satanais since the departure of the latter from Prague a week previously; and notwithstanding this averment, it was clear that the sisters must have communicated, since they had made an appointment to meet at a particular spot and at a given time! But perhaps, thought Sir Ernest de

Colmar, this appointment was arranged previously to the departure of Satanais from Prague; and it might, therefore, be substantially true that no correspondence had passed between the sisters *since* that departure. Nevertheless, granting this hypothesis to be true, wherefore should Gloria have withheld from him the fact that she expected to meet her sister at the very hostel where they had halted at the conclusion of their first day's journey? Ah! could he not account for Gloria's silence on that head? was he not aware that Gloria loved him, and that she was perhaps jealous of her sister?

All these thoughts were passing slowly through the brain of Sir Ernest de Colmar; and the bewildering excitement which they produced effectually maintained slumber at a distance.

But at length a partial drowsiness began to steal slowly over him; and his eye-lids were gradually weighing down, when a sound as of the rustling of female raiment caused him to start suddenly; and—O joy!—the splendid Satanais was before him!

CHAPTER LXI.

THE DARK HOURI.

Yes—by the light of the lamp which was burning in the room, did Sir Ernest de Colmar behold the Daughter of Satan approaching his couch.

She was attired in that garb which she wore when the Austrian first became acquainted with her at the Taborite encampment in the grove. The doublet of purple velvet revealed half the bust that rose so grandly from the corsage to which the splendid contours imparted their well-defined inflections: and the lappels of the small sleeves hung over the upper portions of those arms which were modelled with so admirable a symmetry. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the throat and the splendor of the arching neck: no sculptural perfection could transcend the exquisite slope of the full plump shoulders and the statuesque shape and outline of the back.

And over those shoulders, and upon the bosom of rich proportions, flowed the massive tresses of that hair which though of ebon blackness, was nevertheless lustrous with the sheen of its own natural gloss,—tresses whose velvet smoothness, silken softness, and luxuriant thickness, formed a covering of that beauteous head such as no earthly diadem could equal—no imperial crown excel!

A smile played upon the countenance which this flood of raven hair enframed—that countenance which was made up of the most faultless features lighted by the finest eyes that ever formed the windows of an impassioned woman's soul. Great heaven! when we think of the splendor of those eyes and look back at our several attempts to convey an idea of their glory to the comprehension of our readers—when we feel our imagination sinking, dazzled and bewildered, even from the ideal which itself has created,—and when we vainly seek for terms adequate to explain our notion of the supernal lustre which at times shone with an overpowering steadiness in those large black orbs, and at other moments vibrated like a star,—when we reflect upon all this and experience the poverty of the human language to do justice to the theme, it appears to us as if we had been soaring on eagle pinion, towards the sun, but had fallen back upon the earth, baffled and wing-weary from the adventurous flight.

We have stated, in one of the earliest chapters of our tale, that the whole iris of the Daughter of Satan's eyes was so dark as to leave the pupil undefined—or, in other words, that each orb seemed one large, black, but glowing pupil. Such was indeed the case; and so intense, so powerful, so supernatural was the light which shone in these lamps of sable glass, that the effect was a splendor the most overwhelming, and a magnificence the most portentous. But then the full force and power of these burning orbs was subdued by the lashes that were of unusual length and thickness; and when the looks of the mysterious lady were bent downward, her eyes seemed like diamonds shining from beneath a covering of black gauze.

On the present occasion the lustre of those wondrous orbs were even still more subdued by the ineffable tenderness which filled them, and which was akin to the smile whose seductive softness played upon the bright scarlet lips, between which the teeth shone like orient pearls.

Imagination can conceive naught more picturesque, nothing more romantic, than the appearance of this being, whose raiment was so fanciful, and whose beauty was of that dark splendor, which

made her seem the goddess of night surrounded by a halo of the moon's silver effulgence, and concentrating in her eyes the glory of the lightning! To her knees descended the crimson petticoat which displayed all the lower part of the legs, save and except in so much as they were encircled with the various-colored ribands, which rather set off than concealed the robust symmetry of the limbs, and the pure transparent olive of the flesh. Her whole figure had a gentle and only just perceptible undulating motion, as she slowly traversed the apartment, and approached the couch in which Sir Ernest de Colmar raised himself upon his arm to contemplate the romantic being, ignorant whether she were indeed Satanais, or merely a vision come to cheat him with its blissful but delusive presence!

'My friend—my champion—my deliverer, behold me once again!' spoke that voice whose harmony of golden richness seemed to pour like a flood of beatific ecstacy into the soul of Sir Ernest de Colmar; and advancing close up to the side of the couch, she laid her hand upon his own, while her looks were fixed on his countenance with an expression of ineffable tenderness.

'Is it indeed you, Satanais? or am I the object of a delicious hallucination?' said De Colmar, seizing the hand that was placed in contact with his own, and pressing it to his lips; then still retaining it in his fervid grasp, and feeling it warm and trembling, he exclaimed in a paroxysm of transcendent rapture, 'Oh! yes, it is indeed thou, Satanais—beautiful and beloved Satanais! and it is no delusive vision that steals thus mysteriously upon my ravished senses. But how comest thou hither? and wherefore hast thou come? Is the spell broken—that infernal spell which enjoined that I should behold thee no more?—and wast thou deceived in the expectation that thy destiny impelled thee back to thy native land in the far-off east?'

'The questions which you have put so rapidly, Ernest,' said the darkly splendid being, 'remind me that we have much to converse upon; and I have not yet implored your pardon for thus intruding upon your presence at an hour so untimely, and in a manner so unseemly.'

'O, Satanais! can you even for a single moment believe that it is necessary to demand my pardon for thus conferring so unexpected a boon upon me? 'Tis I,' continued De Colmar, in a tone of impassioned enthusiasm, 'who should pour forth the most fervent gratitude for the happiness which your presence infuses into my soul.'

'Oh! then,' cried Satanais, her rich voice swelling like the majestic symphony of a hymn, 'you entertain towards me the same sentiments which you expressed on that night when I visited your chamber at the Golden Falcon?' and as she thus spoke, her whole countenance lighted up with joy and triumph, and the splendor of her looks became so mysteriously mingled alike with the softness and the fervor of love, that never had she exercised so complete an empire and so despotic a power over the soul of the Austrian warrior. 'But do you remember all that you said to me on that memorable night?' she demanded, with an abruptness that cut short the response he was about to give; 'do you recollect that you avowed feelings stronger than those of friendship, and sentiments more tender than those of fraternity?'

'Yes; not a word ever breathed by my lips in thine ears, has been forgotten by me,' exclaimed De Colmar: nor do I wish to recall one single syllable of all that I may have thus said to thee, thou being of matchless beauty and irresistible fascinations!'

'Then you love me, Ernest?' she said, after a brief pause, and lowering her voice to a murmur that was soft and musical as a rippling stream—while her looks were fixed with fond intentness upon his countenance.

'Oh! can you doubt it?—have you ever doubted it?' exclaimed De Colmar completely hurried away by the tide of impassioned feeling, and irresistibly enthralled by the magic influence of that beauty which he contemplated and those looks which poured floods of passion in unto his soul's profoundest recesses.

"No—I do not doubt your love for *me*, with my dark complexion and my hair black as the wing of night," was the singular observation which Satanais made in a musing tone, as she stood by the bed with one hand fast locked in both those of De Colmar; then, for nearly a minute did she remain motionless as a statue and with her looks absorbed in an intent contemplation of the Knight's handsome countenance.

And he gave back that long, profound, impassioned gaze;—and as his eyes thus embraced all the splendid charms of the face which looked down upon

his own, he felt a flood of elysian rapture flowing steadily in unto his heart's reservoirs, and thence branching off in every direction throughout his entire being.

'Yes, you love me, with my olive skin and my tresses dark as ebony,' resumed Satanais, after a long pause, and again speaking with an abstraction of manner which seemed to indicate that she was rather communing aloud with herself than addressing her observations directly and purposely to De Colmar; 'you love me, with my complexion of bistre and my hair of raven blackness! Oh! how singular is the passion of love—how eccentric, how capricious! But still you *do* love me,' she exclaimed, suddenly awakening from that deep pre-occupation in which the peculiar nature of her thoughts had for nearly a minute held her; 'yes, you *do* love me—and that avowal ought to make me happy! Happy—oh! yes, I might be happy yet——'

But suddenly checking herself with a species of convulsive start, such as one gives when stopping short on the brink of a precipice to which the unconscious steps have advanced during a profound reverie, Satanais averted her countenance and pressed one of her hands to her brow, still abandoning the other to the hold of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Merciful heaven! you are unhappy, Satanais!' exclaimed the knight, drawing her suddenly towards him by the hand which he thus retained in his own.

'No—no,' she cried, abruptly disengaging herself from his grasp; then, as if instantaneously repenting the movement, she threw her arms around his neck and burst into a flood of tears.

'Beloved Satanais, weep not—oh! weep not, I implore you!' said De Colmar, as he strained her to his breast, and covered her cheeks, her lips, and her brow with kisses.

'Alas! alas! must I not weep for that appalling destiny which has led to so much crime?' she exclaimed, in a tone of passionate impetuosity. 'Yes, *I am* unhappy, Ernest; and I should be reduced to the blackest despair, were it not for this love of thine which beams upon me, like the ineffable star of hope through the dense cloud that envelopes my soul!'

'Oh! I can understand you full well, too well,' said De Colmar, in a tone of the deepest sympathy; 'your heart is rent, and your tears fall on behalf of your sister Gloria!'

'Yes; and therefore you cannot wonder that I am unhappy, nor blame me if I weep!' murmured Satanais, gently disengaging herself from De Colmar's arms, and taking a seat by the side of the couch, but still leaving her hand in his grasp. 'The terrible fatality which attached itself to me, and from which your noble generosity achieved my emancipation, appears to have fastened upon the footsteps of my devoted sister. Satan, in surrendering his claim upon me, has doubtless resolved to enmesh her in those toils which shall make her his own. In abandoning the service of heaven, the unhappy Gloria has been hurried by an evil influence into that of hell; and, a Daughter of Glory only in name, she has become a Daughter of Satan in stern reality. But you, my generous-hearted Ernest, you do not think the worse of me on account of my sister's crimes?' suddenly demanded Satanais, fixing her looks, which were full of unspeakable tenderness, upon the Austrian knight.

'Already have I given Gloria an assurance which her sisterly solicitude required on your behalf,' said De Colmar; 'and that assurance was to the effect that I am too just to confound the deeds of one with those of another.'

'Yes, Gloria told me that you had given utterance to that generous sentiment,' murmured Satanais, with an increasing fondness in the ardor of her looks; 'but I was anxious to receive the same assurance from your own lips.—And, oh! my noble-hearted champion, my chivalrous friend, my beloved Ernest, I thank thee for this proof of good feeling towards me?' she exclaimed, lavishing upon the knight the tenderest caresses.

'O Satanais, thou art mine, and I am thine!' he said, in a deep voice, which bespoke the concentration of indescribable emotions; for his senses were intoxicated, as it were, by the influence which that splendid creature's beauty and fascinations shed upon him, her whole being appearing to breathe a perfume of love, and to exhale a soft voluptuousness ineffably melting and tender. 'What mean you, Ernest,' she asked, in a voice that was tremulous and low, as her eyes filled with a delicious langor, which for a few instants almost completely subdued their supernal lustre; 'what mean you by declaring that thou art mine and that I am thine?'

'I mean that I love thee, Satanais, and I believe that thou lovest me in return,' exclaimed De Colmar, absorbed in the contemplation of that splendid countenance, which was not averted from the ardor of his looks, nor drawn back from the pressure of his lips. 'Yes, I love thee, my beauteous one, and it was because I loved thee so tenderly and so well, that the Enemy of Mankind was enabled to conquer me in the fight. But tell me, Satanais—tell me,' he cried, his glance and manner alike denoting a sudden uneasiness; 'tell me how it is that you are enabled to visit me here this night, and how I can thus receive thee without infringing those condition, the violation of which, meseems, must either consign thee back to the thrall of Satan, or else place me in his power beyond all possibility of redemption?'

'Do you not remember, Ernest,' asked the lady, whose countenance was now so near his own that her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, and her glossy tresses touched his dark brown hair,—'do you not remember, Ernest, that on the memorable night of your combat with Satan, when I visited you in your chamber at the inn, I explained that my presence then and there was permitted by a power superior to the one which the result of that conflict had made the arbiter of your destiny? And do you now require to be told that the will of heaven dominates over the mandates of hell, and that the breath of the Almighty can in a moment destroy all the stupendous fabrics of infamy, oppression, or injustice, which Satan may have employed whole centuries to build up?—Surely, then, this omnipotent power can overrule that evil influence which the Enemy of Mankind may impart to your destiny; and if it should seem good to heaven that one or all of the conditions imposed upon you by Satan, should be broken, then will you assuredly be protected and guarded against any dangerous consequences. For where the finger of Providence is apparent, there Satan dares not interfere; and even if the strongest chains which hell's power ever forged were cast around your limbs, they would fall away like scorched threads beneath the glance of the Almighty. Hence, therefore, my beloved Ernest, may'st thou comprehend how it is that instead of being forced to retrace my way to the far-off land of my birth, I am permitted on certain terms to enjoy the freedom of my own will; and hence also is it that two of the four conditions imposed upon thee by Satan are already counteracted by a superior influence.'

'And which are these two conditions?' asked De Colmar, almost as much bewildered by the mysterious language as he was intoxicated by the beauty and the impassioned looks of the romantic being who sate by the side of his couch.

'The two conditions which no longer bind thee, and from which thou art effectually released,' answered Satanais, 'are those which bound thee to conduct Gloria to Vienna, and forbade thee from beholding me again.'

'Heaven be thanked for removing the latter injunction!' exclaimed De Colmar, in a tone of enthusiasm mingled with a certain amount of superstitious awe; for, in order that nothing might be wanting to invest Satanais with as profound a romantic mystery and as wild an interest as possible, it became evident to our hero that she received secret inspirations from heaven, even as she was lately the child and the doomed instrument of hell.

'Yes, I am permitted to behold thee again, my Ernest,' she murmured, the fond ardor of her caresses speedily dissipating the superstitious feeling which had sprung up for a moment in De Colmar's mind.

'But you mentioned that it was only on certain terms that you are relieved from the influence of that mysterious and preterhuman destiny which at first appeared to be urging thee towards thy native orient clime?'

'Such is indeed the truth,' was the lady's response to that question on the part of the knight; 'but those terms—those conditions are already fulfilled,' she added, in a tone of mingled joy and triumph; 'and not many minutes have elapsed since I received the assurance thereof.'

'Then thou art now emancipated altogether from any influence which is displeasing to thee?' exclaimed De Colmar, in a tone of the most fervid satisfaction.

'Yes, so long as I enjoy thy love,' was the murmuring response,' accompanied by a look which inundated the warrior's soul with a flood of ecstatic feeling; then, after a long pause, during which their eyes appeared to blend their spirits in a warm and delicious transfusion, Satanais observed, 'Oh! it is evident that your existence and mine have become wondrously inter-

woven, and that the two threads of the skein must be yet more closely knit ere our destiny be fulfilled. Now you gaze upon me with astonishment, and perhaps your looks will grow full of indignation and annoyance ere I conclude the remarks which I am at present bound to make.'

'Indignation and annoyance at anything *you* may say!' ejaculated De Colmar; no, no—it were impossible that I could experience such sentiments with regard to my well-beloved Satanais!'

And, drawing her head towards him, he kissed her moist, red lips with such impassioned ardor that her blood ran like lightning in her veins, and the rich carnation deepened to its intensest hue upon her cheeks, and her bosom palpitated violently against his chest. But suddenly disengaging herself from this dangerous embrace, and with her whole frame vibrating and trembling beneath the influence of those glowing emotions from the perils of which she was thus abruptly inspired with the presence of mind sufficient to save herself, starting to her feet, smoothing down her glossy sable hair, and then laying her hand softly upon his own, she said with all the most melting, winning, touching softness of her golden voice, 'The terms upon which I am enabled to enjoy perfect freedom in respect to my movements, and to settle where I choose or proceed whithersoever my fancy may lead me, those terms are that I should possess the love of a Christian warrior who never loved before!'

'And that love is indeed thine, O my Satanais!' exclaimed De Colmar, once more seizing her hand and pressing it to her lips.

A long pause then ensued, during which Satanais remained standing by the side of the couch, gazing down upon the handsome features of the warrior, whose face was now upturned towards her own; and inexpressible indeed were the profound tenderness and the fervid devotion which filled that absorbing contemplation on either side.

The lustre of the lamp shone in such a manner upon Satanais as to display the flowing outlines from her splendid proportions; and the tall, elegant, graceful form whose rich contours were thus voluptuously profiled in the mellow light, appeared something more than human indeed as its statuesque beauty of shape and superb length of limb were set off to such advantage by the picturesque garb which she wore. And as De Colmar gazed up fondly into her countenance, and then suffered his looks to wander slowly over her magnificent figure, he felt his heart stirred by emotions of the liveliest rapture; and, yielding at length to the influence of those feelings which thus hurried him along, and which he could not have resisted even had he become suddenly aware that they were precipitating him onward to destruction, he exclaimed, 'Satanais, tell me, my well-beloved, wilt thou become my wife?'

At these words he felt her hand tremble in his own—he observed her entire frame quiver, as it were, with the strength of powerful emotions passing through it and agitating her to the very deepest confines of her being, and he was dazzled and bewildered for a few moments by the looks which Satanais cast upon him and wherein the wildness of joy and the delirium of triumph were mingled with the fervor of passion and the tenderness of gratitude.

'Will I become your wife!' at length she exclaimed, in an almost hysterical outburst of ecstacy; and sinking upon her knees by the bed-side, she glued her lips for nearly a minute to De Colmar's hand, her eyes all the while pouring floods of unspeakable feeling into the depths of his soul.

'Yes, will you become my wife, Satanais?' again demanded our hero, whose senses appeared to be steeped in the bliss of paradise. 'But first,' he exclaimed ere the dark houri had time to reply, 'tell me whether John Zitzka has ever made any particular communication to you concerning myself?'

'Many and many admirable things has he said in your favor, Ernest,' replied the Daughter of Satan; 'but I do not comprehend to what particular statement you may allude——'

'Enough, Satanais, enough!' cried the warrior, a peculiar expression of satisfaction and delight overspreading his countenance. 'I see that everything on this point is as I could wish it to be,' he observed in a musing tone to himself; then fixing this eyes fondly upon the dark houri, he added, O, Satanais, I love you devotedly—devotedly, because I know that you love *me* for my own sake only!'

'Were you the meanest mendicant upon the face of the earth,' cried Satanais in a tone of gushing enthusiasm, 'I should love thee as I now love; and wert thou a prince I could not love thee more!'

'Then again do I ask thee, my beauteous Satanais,' said the knight, his adoring looks still dwelling upon her countenance, 'will thou become my wife?'

'I will,' she answered in a tone of the deepest feeling; and, as she continued upon her knees by the side of the couch, she reposed her cheek upon the hand of her lover. 'But have you well reflected, Ernest,' she asked, in a soft and melting voice, 'upon this proposal which you have made me? Remember that you are an Austrian knight, and that I belong to a far-off clime, that you may have noble connexions and powerful friends, whereas I have but a poor heart-broken sister, already branded as a murderess——'

'I will ensure her safety, if it be not already accomplished,' said De Colmar, 'and I will give her one of my own estates, where there is a secluded mansion in which she can pass the remainder of her days in peace and penitence.'

'Generous man!' exclaimed Satanais, melting into tears of gratitude, 'how noble is your heart! But Gloria's safety is ensured, and she is already on her way towards the oriental clime of our birth, where she will henceforth fix her residence and whence she will never,—never come back. We have parted, that dear but guilty sister and myself,' added Satanais, in a tone which was scarcely audible, 'and our farewells were breathed with the conviction that we should meet no more in this world. But let me again revert to the topic which is now of most touching interest, at least to myself; and let me remind you that your connexions and friends may not approve of the choice you have made.'

'Ah! you have naught to fear upon that head, my Satanais, exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, his handsome countenance lighting up with a glow of pride, 'and perhaps in becoming my wife———But no, the secret shall remain mine for the present, and the surprise will be a meet recompense for that disinterested affection which you bear me,' he added. in a musing tone which became inaudible to the lady ere he had concluded the sentence.

'Almost at the same instant, the lamp began to flicker with approaching extinction; and Satanais, suddenly starting to her feet, bent over the knight, imprinted a long, fervid, and delicious kiss upon his lips; and, pressing his hand with kindred warmth of passion, said, 'I must now leave thee, my well-beloved Ernest, my intended husband! Linda and Beatrice are already acquainted with my presence at this inn, and it was through them that I learnt where your chamber was situated. To their room I shall now proceed; and in the morning I shall be prepared to accompany thee on thy journey towards the Austrian frontier.'

'No travelling companion could possibly prove more welcome, Satanais,' returned the knight; 'and the moment we shall have crossed the frontier,—at the very first town we reach, the blessing of the church shall be pronounced upon our union.'

'Oh! then I shall be overwhelmed with the flood of a happiness which appears too glorious to be otherwise than a dream,' exclaimed the dark houri,—and once more bestowing a tender caress upon Sir Ernest de Colmar, she tripped lightly from the room.

At the same instant the flame of the lamp expired in its socket; and the warrior was left in the dark, to the contemplation of all the varied thoughts and feelings which this interview with Satanais had left in his mind.

CHAPTER LXII.

POOR ANGELA!

It was at that solemn and mysterious hour when twilight preceding the dawn just begins to make things visible, and when the objects in a bed-chamber seem to stand slowly out as it were from a mist, with an effect of a somewhat spectral nature, that Angela Wildon was suddenly awakened from her slumbers by an ejaculation which fell upon her ears.

Starting up to a sitting posture in the couch, she beheld a tall female form, apparelled in dark garments. standing by the side of the bed; and the first thought which flashed through the brain of the forest-maiden was that some grisly tenant of the grave had thus risen up to scare or warn her.

But this was the mere transient idea of a mind in which the numbness and confusion of half-awakened thoughts were struggling with the bewilderment occasioned by the sudden apparition, whatever it might be; and the second glance which Angela threw upon the

object of her evanescent terror, made her aware that it was the countenance of the Daughter of Glory that was looking down intently upon her!

'Be silent,—give not vent to either alarm or surprise!' said the radiant being, in a low, rapid, and imperious tone; and withdrawing from Angela's countenance those eyes which shone with a preternatural lustre in the midst of the twilight obscurity, she swept her searching looks around the apartment. 'Yes, there indeed is the armor which you have worn,' she observed, in a musing tone, as her glance settled for a few instants upon the panoply, 'and I am not deceived!'

'Deceived in what, lady?' inquired Angela, timidly, for she did not know to what motive to attribute this extraordinary visit on the part of Gloria, and she feared lest she was about to be reproached for the part she had played concerning the State Prisoners. 'In what respect do you say that you are not deceived?' again asked Angela, in a gentle and conciliatory tone.

'In the fact that you are *the unknown* now travelling with Sir Ernest de Colmar,' responded the Daughter of Glory, in a voice that was sombre, gloomy, and almost menacing. 'But listen to me attentively,' she suddenly resumed, after a few moments' pause, during which the forest-maiden was bewildered what to think or how to act in respect to Gloria's presence in her chamber,—'listen to me attentively, I say, and interrupt me not! When you were rescued from the deep waters of the Moldau, my handmaidens succored you and my pavilion furnished you a couch. Then, in the evening of that same day, you were conducted with the tenderest care and attention to the suite of apartments which had been prepared for my reception in the Castle of Prague. For several days did you sojourn there in my company; and I will appeal to you whether I treated you with the affection of a friend or with the cold ceremony of a mere stranger.'

'Yes, lady, your conduct was most kind and most generous towards me,' said Angela, in a low and plaintive tone —'and I am well aware that you are about to tax me with the deepest ingratitude;—or rather, with the basest breach of a noble hospitality.'

'And will not my reproach be just?' asked the Daughter of Gloria, on whose sunny hair the pensile streaks of the dawn now played through the casement. 'For to what purpose did Angela Wildon turn the kindness which she received and the confidence reposed in her?' continued Gloria, her tone becoming gently remonstrative rather than sternly severe.

'Permit me to offer a few words of explanation,' exclaimed the forest-maiden, in a tone of mingled entreaty and firmness. 'Particular reasons which I shall not pause to describe, prompted me to undertake a task which at first seemed nearly impossible, and as insane as it was hopeless. This was the deliverance of the State Prisoners from the Castle of Prague. From my forest home I journeyed; and, after many delays and some few adventures, I arrived in the Bohemian capital. The very next morning, at an early hour, I sallied forth from the inn to view that dread fortalice in which the noble prisoners were confined. The questions which I put, with an air of common curiosity, to the loiterers and the boatmen upon the river's bank, made me acquainted with the fact that there was a canal entrance into the castle. The horrors of legendary lore and the terrors of superstition had invested that caverned avenue with a more than common interest; and thus the men to whom I addressed myself, were as communicative as their knowledge on the subject would permit them to be. At all events I heard enough to excite within me the determination to inspect that vaulted river passage; and as the tide was very low at the time, I repaired at once to the spot. But while toiling with difficulty over the huge stones which lie at the foot of the castle wall, and which the ebb of the Moldau leaves bare, I missed my footing, fell into the stream, and was instantaneously borne away by the current. Sir Ernest de Colmar rescued me, and this incident made me acquainted with yourself lady. But if I have wearied you with all these details, my object has merely been to convince you that the release of the State Prisoners was not an idea suggested by my sojourn in the Castle of Prague, but a purpose already settled and firmly rooted in my mind.—Were it otherwise, you might with justice accuse me of treachery; but I swear to you most solemnly that when your hospitality led me to become an inmate of the Castle of Prague, I had already been concerting with myself how I should obtain admission within

its walls. Thus the generous part which you played towards me did not suggest to me the scheme of liberating the prisoners, but merely aided it.'

'And should not that very hospitality have disarmed you of your purpose, Angela,' inquired the Daughter of Glory, in a reproachful tone, 'inasmuch as you were aware that General Zitzka was my guardian and that I myself belonged to the Taborite sect?'

'Lady, I believe and still believe that it was not a mere accidental combination of circumstances which rendered me an inmate of that very castle which I so deeply longed to penetrate,' answered the forest-maiden; 'but I beheld in that chain of events the hand of a providential power which was guiding, succoring, and encouraging me. And having, therefore, my settled purpose still in view, surely—surely, dear lady, I may be pardoned if I listened attentively to all the remarks which were made around me during my sojourn in your apartments at the fortress. But whatever your opinion may henceforth be concerning me, I do not hesitate to avow the truth—the whole truth—upon the present occasion; and in this spirit do I confess that it was by means of the observations I overheard and the questions I put, that I learnt not only where the State prisoners were confined, but likewise an amount of topographical knowledge which proved of material assistance to me afterwards. The watchword, you will remember, was duly communicated to your ladyship every twenty-four hours, and you were accustomed to mention it to Linda and Beatrice in case they might be challenged by some sentinel unacquainted with their persons, while rambling about the castle. From their lips did I accordingly glean the talismanic passport for the special period during which it was available; and, assisted by all the circumstances which I have detailed, was the liberation of the State prisoners effected by my hands.'

'The explanation which you have given me, Angela,' said the Daughter of Glory,' compels me to view your conduct in a far more favorable light. At all events, I have heard enough to convince me that the blackest ingratitude does not form a feature of your character; and therefore may I expect a ready consent on your part to the boon which I am about to demand of you.'

'Speak, lady—hesitate not to put my gratitude towards you to the test!' exclaimed the forest-maiden, overjoyed at the turn which the conversation had taken. 'And oh! believe me,' she continued in a more solemn tone, 'when I assure you that profound and sincere is the sympathy which I entertain towards you—the compassion which I feel for you on account of that deed——'

'Oh! then you do not believe that I am as guilty as circumstances would tend to make me appear?' exclaimed Gloria.

'I believe, lady,' answered the forest maiden, 'that you must have received a provocation of so goading a nature as to triumph over the powers of human endurance. For were not this my conviction, and did I look upon you as a mere cold-blooded murderess—oh! not for an instant should we have held this friendly converse together. But now I am reminded to ask you, lady, whether it be safe for you to appear at this hostel, which is but half a day's journey distant from the scene of the sad tragedy?'

'Fear not for me, Angela,' responded Gloria; 'it is no ordinary influence that shields me, no common puissance that protects me! My visit to this inn has been paid on your account, and for you only; and hence is it a secret——'

'Ah! lady, fear not that I shall betray you!' exclaimed Angela. 'But the boon which you have to ask at my hands——'

'Is easily granted,' returned the Daughter of Glory. 'Do you promise that you will afford me this proof of your gratitude for any kindness which you may have received at my hands? But you hesitate—you hesitate,' exclaimed the beauteous lady in a tone of feverish excitement; and she put back with her dazzling white hand the flood of golden tresses which had fallen too far over her countenance, and with which the glinting sunbeams now mingled their nascent glory.

'Speak, lady—speak!' cried Angela, hurt by the suspicion implied in the words which the lovely being had last uttered; 'and fear not that I shall refuse any demand to which in maidenly honor and propriety I may assent. Tell me, then, without farther delay, for the sun is already rising over the eastern hills,—tell me, I say, what is the boon which you require?'

'That you at once separate yourself from the company of Sir Ernest de Colmar,' was the Daughter of Glory's prompt reply; and her looks—those

overpowering looks—were fixed with all their lustrous potency upon the countenance of the forest-maiden.

'At once—now—this morning?' demanded the latter, in broken sentences.

'Without any farther delay than is absolutely necessary to bid him farewell,' was Gloria's imperious rejoinder.

'Lady,' said Angela, after a moment's deep thought, 'I owe you a large debt of gratitude—I am likewise bound to testify to you that I do not possess an ungrateful heart—and I therefore promise compliance with your wish.'

'I thank you, Angela—I thank you,' exclaimed the Daughter of Glory, taking the forest-maiden's hand and pressing it with fervor. 'But bear in mind that my visit to you this morning is to remain a profound secret, and that you mention not to Sir Ernest de Colmar the motive which prompts you to part company from him.'

'Lady, I will perform with fidelity all that you enjoin so strictly,' said Angela.

'Once more I thank thee, kind maiden,' whispered Gloria, in a voice through the tremulousness of which a mingled joy and triumph penetrated; 'yes, I thank thee sincerely!' she added, subduing the emotion which was expressed in her former utterance. 'And now farewell, Angela—farewell.'

With this hurried exclamation the Daughter of Glory quitted the chamber, and Angela rose from her couch with a heavy heart.

Yes, and with an increasing depression of spirits did she perform her hasty toilette, and then resume the polished armor in which she had fought by the side of the warrior whom she loved, and from whom she had pledged herself to part so soon!

But wherefore should she repine thus? Had she not all along determined to take leave of him the moment they should arrive within sight of Altendorf Castle? and would not another twelve hour's journey bring them to that point? Ah! true indeed was all this; but those who are acquainted with the power of love do not require to be told how it was that Angela sighed at the stern necessity which forbade her the enjoyment of De Colmar's company for those twelve hours more.

And now her armor was resumed, her vizor was once again lowered over her countenance; and, with a palpitating heart, did she descend from her chamber.

Sir Ernest de Colmar had already risen, and was at that moment in the court-yard of the hostel, giving some instructions to his grooms; but the instant he beheld Angela approaching, he hastened to greet her with all the cordiality of a friendship not only pledged, but positively experienced.

'Good morrow to thee, my brave unknown,' exclaimed the knight, taking Angela's gauntletted hand. 'Surely thou must be wearied by the constant weight of thy panoply; but let me hope that the time is near when the necessity for maintaing a strict incognito shall cease.'

'That moment has now arrived,' returned Angela, with difficulty modulating her voice so as to conceal the emotions which filled her gentle breast. 'I am about to reveal myself, and then take leave of your excellency—perhaps for ever,' she added, with a mournfulness of accent which she could not control.

'For ever!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'But what strange and deplorable fatality compels me thus to part from one whose friendship I long to cherish?'

'Seek not to penetrate, Sir Knight,' returned Angela, again recovering her self-possession, 'into the motives which have inspired me with the sudden resolution to bid you farewell some few hours sooner than I had at first expected.'

'In good sooth,' exclaimed De Colmar, 'I cannot consent that we should part thus! You are about to reveal your name, it is true; but scarcely have I learnt to love you as a brother, even without knowing who you are or having ever seen your face, when you determine to separate yourself from me.'

'There is no alternative,' rejoined Angela, with difficulty suppressing a profound sigh.

'But what can I do for you, generous youth, to prove my gratitude for the services you have rendered me?' demanded our hero. 'Speak—I am rich, I am likewise powerful at the Austrian Court——'

'Give me that good steed which I have ridden in your company,' said Angela, her voice becoming every instant more tremulous with emotion; and in order to obtain a few moments' leisure to collect herself, ere she came to the last trial in the revelation of her sex and name, she walked rapidly up to the spot where one of the knight's dependants was grooming the horse to which she had alluded. 'Yes, give me this good

steed,' she repeated; 'and every time I look upon the noble animal, I shall not fail to think of Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'I have already considered the steed to be thine from the moment thou didst cross its back,' responded the knight.—'Therefore some additional proof of friendship must I give thee——'

'I require none,' interrupted Angela, in a tone of the deepest feeling; then, turning hastily towards the groom, she bade him saddle the horse without delay.

'There is something strange and unsettled in your manner, my dear friend,' observed De Colmar; 'and it is impossible that I can suffer you to depart with a secret grief upon your soul, or a hidden cause of despondency in your heart. Tell me, then——'

At this moment Satanais, attended by Linda and Beatrice, appeared upon the threshold of the door communicating with the court-yard of the inn; and an ejaculation of mingled surprise and admiration escaped from Angela's lips as she caught sight of that splendid being, whose charms were set off by so picturesque a costume.

Turning a look of inquiry upon the Austrian warrior, the forest-maiden was instantaneously struck by the expression of pleasure which animated his handsome countenance, at the sight of that superb creature with the dark complexion and the romantic garb; and a suspicion, vivid as a lightning flash, darted athwart her imagination.

'Is not that the Lady Satanais, Gloria's sister?' she demanded in a tone to which the sudden presence of her natural virgin pride imparted an extraordinary firmness.

'It is. Let me introduce you to her ere you take your departure,' said the knight, moving as he spoke towards the door where Satanais was still standing. 'Come, my dear friend, and you shall reveal your name to me in her presence, that she may likewise know you well and learn to esteem you.'

'No—oh! no—no!' cried Angela, seized with a sudden bewilderment which threw all her ideas into as deep a confusion as if she were struck with vertigo; and the nest moment, obedient to an irresistible impulse, she sprang upon the steed which stood ready caparisoned near, dashed her spurs into its sides, and flew like the whirlwind from the presence of the astonished beholders of this abrupt and unaccountable flight.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE FUNERAL PROCESSION.

We must now leave Sir Ernest de Colmar and Satanais, attended by the handmaidens and the grooms, to pursue their journey towards the Austrian frontier, while we return to that hostel where the first halt had been made and at which the young page Ermach was murdered by the Daughter of Glory.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning,—the same morning as that whose incidents occupied the preceding chapter,—and the landlord was seated with his wife at their well-spread breakfast table, conversing upon the events of the previous day, when a horseman galloped up to the door of the inn.

He came from the direction of Prague, and was mounted upon a steed of great power and agility, which he had evidently ridden at a rapid rate. He himself was travel-soiled; the steel polish of his head piece and his corselet was dimmed with the dews of night—and his boots were covered with dust. The handle of his sword was muffled in black cloth, and a slip of the same sable material was tied round his right arm, these signs indicating that he either mourned the death of some relative or else belonged to a funeral procession. He was a man of middle age, hard-featured, and with a somewhat sinister look; and in his manner as well as in the expression of his countenance it was easy to read the bold, reckless, and desperate nature of his disposition.

Hastily dismounting from his steed and tossing the bridle to the hostler, the armed traveller strode into the hostel and demanded a goblet of wine to refresh himself withal. This was immediately supplied; and when the man had slaked his thirst, he proceeded to communicate the object of his visit.

'You must bustle about, worthy host—and you likewise, my buxom hostess,' he said, in a tone of mingled familiarity and imperiousness. 'For a numerous party will be here anon to partake of all the good things that you can prepare at so short a notice for their breakfast. In a word, it is a funeral procession which is passing this way; and I have ridden forward in advance to see that adequate arrangements are made for the reception of the party during the

short halt which they will allow themselves at your hospitable establishment.'

'Of how many persons does the party consist?' inquired the landlord and his wife, both speaking as it were in the same breath.

'There cannot be less than twenty-four of us altogether,' replied the man, 'and in two hours you may expect the arrival of the procession.'

'Two hours!' ejaculated the hostess, 'that is little enough to provide for such a number, and most likely people of quality amongst them into the bargain!'

'Yes,—my masters are of rank and wealth; but they now preserve the strictest incognito for certain reasons of their own,' said the horseman. 'However, that is not your business; and here are ten good golden pieces as an earnest that you will be liberally paid for such entertainment as you may afford.'

'Depend upon it that complete satisfaction will be given,' exclaimed the host, joyfully receiving the money.—'Come, wife, bustle about! Away with you to the kitchen, while I see that the rooms are all got in readiness. By the bye, my good friend,' he added, turning towards the armed messenger, are there any ladies in the procession?'

'Yes; there is one lady, attended by four handmaidens,' was the response. 'But wherefore that question?'

'Simply that I may know the nature of the accommodation likely to be required,' answered the landlord. 'I presume that the party having partaken of the meal and duly rested, will continue their journey forthwith? that is to say, there is no chance of beds being required for to-night?'

'No, no,' returned the armed man—'ere sunset we shall be far away on our journey southward. But I shall now proceed to the stable and ascertain that my horse is properly cared for while you attend to your household concerns.'

The two hours speedily slipped away—and at the expiration of that interval the procession was seen advancing at a tolerably rapid rate. It came along the road from the direction of Prague; and all the inmates of the hostel turned out to receive this numerous company.

As the out-riding messenger had stated, the cavalcade consisted of no less than twenty-four persons, all mounted on horseback. In front a lady, closely veiled and attired in mourning garments, rode upon a beautiful palfrey of the glossiest sable. On her right hand there were two warriors in complete armor, with their vizors closed; but the golden spurs upon their heels showed that they were men of rank. On her left rode a priest of the Carthusian order, and whose cowl completely shaded his features. Immediately behind this front rank, appeared four handmaidens, whose remarkable beauty was concealed by no invidious veils.—These lovely girls were followed by four pages, whose handsome countenances and graceful figures constituted appropriate sequences to the charms which had just preceded them. Next came a hearse, or funeral-car, drawn by four black steeds guided by two postilions in deep mourning. A mute rode on each side of the sombre vehicle, on which the coffin was placed, covered with an ample pall of sable velvet having a white cross in the middle. The procession was closed by seven men armed like the one who had performed the part of outriding messenger and who was evidently their comrade; for not only was their apparel thus uniform, but their countenances all expressed the same ruffian-like determination and desperado kind of character.

Thus, the front rank consisting of the veiled lady, the two warriors in complete armor, and the Carthusian priest—then the four handmaidens—next the four pages; afterwards, the two postilions and the two mutes, and lastly, the eight armed men forming the guard or escort, these made up the aggregate of twenty-four.

The lady and her handmaidens were conducted by the hostess to the chamber already provided for their reception—and the Carthusian priest attended them to the door of that apartment. But he proceeded no farther than the threshold, where he said a few words in a low but impressive whisper to the eldest of the four handmaidens; and then, bowing respectfully to the lady, he retired.

In the meantime the lady herself had sunk upon a seat, evidently in a state of much bodily fatigue; and perhaps, as the landlady thought, of mental depression also, for a profound sigh, coming from the bosom of the veiled stranger, reached the ears of the worthy hostess.

'Can I be of any service here?—or do you require aught for the moment?'

asked the latter, not addressing herself to any one in particular, but glancing rapidly round upon the lady and her four charming dependants.

'We require nothing at present,' said the handmaiden who has already been specially alluded to as the eldest. 'Her ladyship will repose herself for a couple of hours; and you can bring up refreshments so soon as the repast is in readiness. Her ladyship will permit *us*,' added the girl, glancing at her fellow-dependants, 'to take our meal in her company.'

This little dialogue between the hostess and the eldest handmaiden took place at the entrance of the apartment; while at the farther extremity the lady appeared to have fallen into a profound reverie—unless, indeed, she were yielding to the influence of a slumber arising from fatigue; but on this point the hostess could not satisfy herself, inasmuch as the lady retained her veil over her countenance. It, however, forcibly struck the worthy woman that the lady was not altogether her own mistress, and that she was indeed under some species of restraint; for the priest had appeared to be looking at her while he breathed his hurried whisper to the handmaiden, and the handmaiden herself had subsequently spoken with a real authority, though with an assumed deference; and there was, moreover, something like despair in the profound listlessness to which the lady had abandoned herself the instant she entered the room, and which was broken only by that sigh which had been so unmistakeably wafted to the ears of the hostess.

All these circumstances were trivial enough in themselves, it is true; but still they struck the landlady and created in her mind the impression we have mentioned. Accordingly, as she returned to the kitchen, she stopped for a moment to impart her suspicions to her husband; but he treated the matter indifferently enough, observing that it was no business of their's, and bidding her attend to her own concerns.

In the meantime the Carthusian priest had repaired to the room where a table was spread for himself and the two warriors in complete armor—a separate apartment having been prepared for the accommodation of the pages, the attendants on the hearse, and the eight armed men constituting the guard.

The two warriors now raised their vizors; and we may as well at once observe that one was the Marquis of Schomberg, and the other the Baron of Altendorf. As for the priest, our readers have doubtless already conjectured that this reverend traveller was none other than Father Cyprian.

'Have you seen her royal highness safe to the chamber prepared for her?' demanded the Baron of Altendorf, when the Carthusian entered the room.

'I accompanied her to the threshold,' was the response, as the priest threw back his cowl; 'and I enjoined the eldest of her handmaidens to watch her movements with lynx-eyes, and see that she does not escape us.'

'Her hatred against us all appears to be most inveterate,' observed the Marquis of Schomberg. 'That she was impatient of her sojourn at the White Mansion, I was well aware; but that she should evince so thorough a dislike, amounting to a perfect abhorrence——

'Let us not waste time upon the point,' interrupted Father Cyprian hastily. 'Suffice it for us and our purpose that she is so completely in our power as to resemble a bird in the inextricable meshes of a fowler; and if we succeed in placing her upon the Bohemian throne, she becomes our puppet—our doll—a mere automaton in our hands, while her crown will prove the talisman of our aggrandizement.'

'All this has been well weighed and calculated by us,' observed the Marquis of Schomberg; 'but remember that if we once suffer her royal highness to escape from us, farewell to all our dreams of grandeur and power.'

'The handmaidens are faithful, and will rigorously perform the part of custodians,' said Father Cyprian. 'I will moreover take care that the princess does not have an opportunity of communicating with any stranger until we get her inside the walls of Altendorf Castle.'

'And then we hoist the royal standard of Bohemia,' added the baron, 'and proclaim a war to the death against John Zitzka and his Taborite hordes.'

'Yes—and every feudal stronghold throughout the land will give back the martial shout,' observed the priest; 'and if need be, I will take the cross in my hand and go forth to preach a crusade against the Taborites. But I hope and prophesy that our's will be a comparatively easy victory——'

'Do not give way to such a delusion,' said the Marquis of Schomberg, in a solemn tone. 'That the royal cause

will eventually triumph, I feel assured —and that the Princess Elizabetha will ere long sit upon the throne of her ancestors, I am well convinced. But that the struggle will be short, or that our arms will achieve a prompt success, I do not for a single moment imagine. No—the conflict will be long and bloody; and the royal standard will trail through oceans of gore and its bearer will trample over myriads of the slain, ere it be planted upon the Castle of Prague. For remember that this will be a war not so much between religious sects, as between the principles of Monarchy and Aristocracy on the one hand, and those of Republicanism and Democracy on the other.'

'Granted!' ejaculated the Carthusian. 'But what would your lordship have me thence infer?'

'That the masses will fight desperately on the side of the man who upholds and indeed represents the principles which they must naturally love and admire,' responded the Marquis of Schomberg; 'whereas all our troops will be mere hirelings and mercenaries —men who sell their swords to the highest bidder. These are the reasons which induce me to declare that the struggle will be a long and a sanguinary one—a struggle in which no quarter will be given, and which will devastate Bohemia's cities as if with an earthquake, and depopulate her fairest provinces as if with a pestilence. For all these tremendous results must we prepare ourselves; but the triumph will be our's in the long run, because the middle class will in due time declare on the side of the royalists, and the poorer orders will then be crushed and compelled to place their necks beneath our feet.'

'Your opinions demand respect, my lord,' said the Baron of Altendorf; 'and yet I am the more inclined to agree with Father Cyprian, that the struggle will be crowned with a speedy triumph. For do we not possess the grand talisman of success?'

'Gold?' said the marquis, not precisely comprehending the baron's meaning.

'Yes, gold,' rejoined the latter. 'The fortune of the Princess Elizabetha is in our possession, and John Zitzka would almost give his remaining eye to get that vast treasure into his own hands. For he knows full well that if the soil be sown with gold pieces, vast armies will soon spring up; and there are many chances in favor of those soldiers who are best paid and best fed.'

'Meseems that your lordships are entering into a discussion which may well be deferred to a more fitting occasion,' said the Carthusian; then, by way of at once diverting the discourse to another topic, he said, addressing himself to the Baron of Altendorf, 'I hope that your lordship's son will be at the castle to receive the Count of Rosenberg.'

'There can be no doubt of it,' responded the baron. 'Rodolph would not on any account have quitted the castle—no, not even when he must have heard of my arrest at Prague. For if the accursed Taborites had taken it into their heads to throw a garrison into Altendorf, Rodolph was prepared to resist the attempt unto the very death; and he had my most positive orders to stand siege, and storm, and escalade, sooner than yield an inch to the republican rabble. With such a spirit and determination, it was imperatively necessary that he should remain at the castle which he had sworn to defend.'

'But no endeavor has been made on the part of the Taborites to occupy Altendorf, I believe?' said the Marquis of Schomberg, inquiringly.

'Not to my knowledge,' answered the baron. 'But judging of the forbearance hitherto shown by Zitzka towards the strongholds and mansions of the aristocracy in general, I should scarcely apprehend that any molestation has been attempted with regard to my fortalice in particular.'

'The Count of Rosenberg will reach Altendorf to-night,' remarked Father Cyprian; 'And he will therefore give Lord Rodolph such information as will lead to the most ample arrangements—'

'For the reception of the princess and the immediate gathering of all my vassals to defend the royal standard,' added the baron. 'It was fortunate that Lord Rosenberg so willingly undertook, or rather volunteered, to hasten forward with all possible speed and prepare my son for our arrival.'

'The count, be it remembered,' observed Father Cyprian, 'was anxious to reach his own castle and place it in a condition of defence—well knowing that the rage of Zitzka at the escape of his State prisoners would know no bounds.'

'Yes, the count will be at Altendorf this evening, and he will sleep at his own stronghold to-night,' said the baron

in a musing tone. 'His disguise was impenetrable, his steed was excellent, and he had therefore nothing to dread in the form of danger or delay. But here are we two days' journey behind him——'

'True, my lord,' interposed Father Cyprian; 'but remember all the arrangements we had to make—the organization of the funereal procession, which is the only plan that could have ensured the safe conveyance of——'

'Well, well,' cried the baron, 'I did not mean to complain. On the contrary, I must admit that your reverence's scheme is an admirable one. For by the very pomp and parade of this procession is suspicion totally disarmed; and thus not only do the Marquis and myself enjoy secure travelling, despite of Zitzka's emissaries, but the safe conveyance of the treasure is likewise guaranteed——'

'My lord, be cautious, I implore you!' exclaimed Father Cyprian; 'the walls have ears for such important secrets as our's—and the fate of Bohemia depends upon our discretion. Hitherto everything has gone favorably with us—I mean since the events of the other night when the freaks of the personage calling himself Sir Ernest de Colmar threw the White Mansion into alarm.'

'The mention of those occurrences reminds me to ask how fares it with your arm?' observed the Marquis of Schomberg.

'The wound I received from the Austrian's sword was a severe one,' returned the Carthusian, throwing back the right sleeve of his gown and displaying his arm all covered with bandages; 'but it ceases to pain me now, although I experience a sad stiffness in the elbow joint. At all events, your lordships will do me the credit to allow that I lost none of my energies with the copious bloodletting which I suffered on the occasion, and had it not been that the sanguine effusion was so great as to alarm the servitors who were with me, and prompt them to hurry me with all possible despatch into Hamelen Castle,—had it not been for this interruption, I say, most assuredly should I have continued to pursue the Austrian and his companions. My chief regret is that my trusty dagger should have missed the treacherons Ermach: but he will sooner or later stumble in my way—and then shall he taste the doom of the Virgin's Kiss," added the priest, his countenance darkening and contracting with a diabolical expression of malignant meaning.

'The Count de Rosenberg was profoundly astonished at that sudden explosion of warfare within the walls of the White Mansion,' said the Baron of Altendorf: 'and I could plainly perceive that there was a moment when he felt the influence of the strongest suspicions. The conduct of that youth Angelo Wildon naturally appeared very incomprehensible to the count; who could not conceive wherefore he should deliver us from custody at one moment, and then lock us up in a room togther at another. And even when your reverence spoke of some bond of friendship most probably existing between that youth and the Austrian,—even then, I say, De Rosenberg did not appear altogether satisfied with the explanation; and I saw full well that he fancied there was more behind.'

'It was therefore fortunate,' observed the Marquis of Schomberg, 'that the count was so prompt and eager to volunteer his services in the capacity of herald, to announce the intention of the Princess to visit Altendorf Castle without delay.'

'Nor was our acceptance of the proposal less prompt,' added the Baron of Altendorf, laughing,—'for we were thereby enabled to get rid of the count within an hour from the occurrence of all those scenes and conflicts which evidently impressed him with an unpleasant idea concerning the White Mansion and its occupants. But, by the bye,' exclaimed his lordship, turning towards the priest, 'your reverence promised to make some revelation touching that same Angelo Wildon, so soon as there was a leisure moment to devote to the subject.'

'And that moment is not the present one,' returned the Carthusian,—'for I hear the landlord approaching with our repast.'

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door was thrown open, and the host made his appearance, followed by his wife and a couple of domestics bearing dishes the contents of which filled the apartment with their savory perfume. But while the meal was being spread upon the table, the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baron of Altendorf turned towards the window in such a manner that their countenances were completely averted from the people of the inn, for they did not choose to lower their vizors the instant

the door was thrown open, inasmuch as the desire to conceal their features would become too glaring; and yet they were anxious to avoid every chance of being recognized, because they were well aware that Zitzka's emissaries had been despatched all over Bohemia with descriptions of the personal appearance of each of the State Prisoners.

Accordingly, so soon as the dishes were placed upon the table, the Carthusian priest hinted that the presence of attendants could be dispensed with. The landlord thereupon withdrew, followed by his wife and domestics, the two nobles and Father Cyprian thus remaining once more alone together.

'We were speaking just now of the events which occurred the other night at the White Mansion,' said the Baron of Altendorf, after quaffing a goblet of Rhenish wine, 'and the subject recurring to my mind, induces me to ask your reverence whether you think that the treachery of the young page Ermach can have extended so far as a complete exposure and revelation of all the mysteries of the White Mansion. For if so, the Austrian must entertain a pretty opinion——'

'I am confident that Ermach would not dare violate the tremendous oath which binds him to secrecy,' interrupted the Carthusian. 'He might have been anxious to leave the mansion—he may have availed himself of the Austrian's presence to accomplish that desire, and he would therefore naturally assist that personage's egress, together with Angelo Wildon; but *there*, depend upon it, his perfidy stopped. It would not be the first instance, my lords, of an inmate of the White Mansion escaping therefrom, and yet observing inviolable the oath of initiation. For the nature of that oath, and all the circumstances under which it is taken, together with the ghastly witnesses in whose presence the vow is recorded, leave upon the mind even of the bravest and the strongest an impression which calls up a cold shudder every time it recurs to the memory. These reasons, therefore, induce me to believe that Ermach will not draw aside the veil which conceals the mysteries of the White Mansion from the eyes of the Austrian.'

'And if the contrary should be the case?' said the Baron of Altendorf, inquiringly.

'Ah! then should we have to dread the very worst,' returned Father Cyprian, with a gloomy look; 'for the Austrian was more or less on friendly terms with John Zitzka, and he would doubtless make known to the Taborite the nature of the White Mansion. Had such a course been adopted, not a stone of either that abode of pleasure nor of Hamelen Castle would by this time remain standing on another!' added the Carthusian, in a deep and solemn tone.

'Yes, those edifices would indeed be abandoned to the rage of the Taborites,' said the Marquis of Schomberg. 'But surely the Austrian must have entertained alarming suspicions respecting the White Mansion, even before he penetrated thither the other night; and the imprudent conduct of the baroness,' he added in a tone of deep vexation, 'could not have failed to strengthen those suspicions. Besides, he accused the baroness of having made away with his two pages; and thus must he assuredly have believed her to be not only a woman of an easy virtue, concealed beneath the mask of an admirably assumed hypocrisy, but likewise a murderess!'

'Your lordship speaks in harsh terms of your own mistress,' exclaimed Father Cyprian, who, as well as the Baron of Altendorf, surveyed the marquis with astonishment.

'I was merely specifying in plain terms the opinion which the Austrian must entertain of the Baroness Hamelen,' said the Lord of Schomberg; 'and I am amazed that he should have quitted Prague so abruptly—indeed, the very morning after the occurrences of that eventful night—without taking any farther steps to discover the fate of his pages, which was evidently his object in penetrating into the White Mansion. But is it certain that he did take his departure thus suddenly? and how came your reverence to learn that he had quitted Prague at all?'

'An emissary whom I despatched to the Golden Falcon to make private inquiries concerning the movements of the Austrian, brought me the intelligence of his departure at daybreak that morning. But, after all, my lord,' continued Father Cyprian, addressing himself to the Marquis of Schomberg,—'what does the Austrian really know concerning the White Mansion and the Baroness? and how much can he suspect? I mean, if we suppose that he has learnt nothing from Ermach. That the baroness conceals her gallantry beneath the veil of benevolence, charity,

and piety—that her mansion contains scenes of pleasure and enjoyment, as well as subterranean passages and armed men—these are the secrets which he has learnt! But the chivalrous generosity of his character would not allow him to proclaim to the world that the Baroness Hamelen cast upon him amorous looks, and introduced him with all the significancy of the tender passion into her dwelling. And there is another reason, my lord—yes, another reason,' added the priest, with a deep inward chuckle, 'why the Austrian would not set the Taborites against the White Mansion, nor even do aught that might in any way direct the suspicions of John Zitzka thereto; and this reason is that the Austrian knew that the Princess Elizabetha was harbored within those walls.'

'True!' ejaculated the Baron of Altendorf; 'that reason is conclusive.—But is it not possible that the Austrian may have obtained a clue to the fate of his pages, and that his sudden departure was for the purpose of following some such a trace along the southern road.'

'Ah! let him have discovered what trace he may,' exclaimed the Carthusian, 'he will sooner or later lose it altogether. It must be like a stream which suddenly disappears under ground—and vainly does the traveller seek to ascertain where it rises again.'

'Yes, the simile is correct enough,' observed the Baron of Altendorf; 'but suppose that the stream of the Austrian's should happen to carry him up to the very wall of my castle?'

'What, think you that he will hasten into his own country, and return with an army to besiege Altendorf, in order to discover the fate of his pages or avenge them?' exclaimed the Carthusian. 'No, no, my lord—such an eventuality is not to be apprehended; especially as the royal standard of Bohemia will shortly float over the towers of Altendorf.'

'Doubtless the Austrian must have passed this way,' said the Marquis of Schomberg, after a pause, during which the two nobles and the priest did honor to the repast; 'and in that case, it is probable that he sojourned at this hostel. We might ascertain from the landlord how many persons travelled with him, so as to learn whether the treacherous page Ermach be in his suite.'

'Aye, and likewise Angela Wildon,' muttered the priest to himself; for he suddenly remembered that she had overheard—or rather he fancied that she had overheard all his conversation with Dame Martha at the village inn upon the heath, whereas she had in reality only caught a portion of it, as the reader is already aware.

'What were you saying to yourself?' demanded the Baron of Altendorf.

'Nothing of any consequence,' replied Father Cyprian; 'I will now go and question the landlord,' and with these words, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE CARTHUSIAN, THE HOST, AND THE HOSTESS.

Threading a long and sombre gallery, Father Cyprian proceeded to what in modern parlance would be termed the bar-parlor; and there he found the landlord and landlady casting up a long reckoning upon a slate.

The moment the priest's shadow darkened the open doorway, the host respectfully invited him to enter, and the hostess placed a chair for his accommodation, at the same time proffering him a glass of cordial, compounded after a specific receipt of her own. For this civility the Carthusian returned suitable acknowledgments, accepting the liqueur and bestowing his benediction upon the worthy couple. He then asked for the score of the entertainment given to his party; and the landlord presented him the slate, which was covered with such extraordinary hieroglyphic characters, that the priest could not possibly have decyphered them even if he had attempted the task. But having ascertained the sum total, he liquidated it with readiness, and added a liberal gratuity for the behoof of the domestics.

'Have you been tolerably busy of late?' inquired the Carthusian, accepting a second glass of cordial which the landlady forced upon him.

'We had been dull enough for some weeks until the day before yesterday,' replied the host; 'and then a party arrived in the evening, passed the night, and remained until about two o'clock yesterday. But during that short interval, circumstances of such a terrible and at the same time singular nature occurred, that never before were events

so numerous or of so fearful an interest crowded into so short a space.'

'What do you mean?' demanded the priest. 'You excite my curiosity strangely.'

'Ah! then the news has not as yet travelled up the road towards Prague,' observed the landlord, looking at his wife as he spoke.

'What news, my good man?' inquired the Carthusian.

'The news of the terrible murder which was committed the night before last beneath this roof,' responded the host, his voice becoming solemn and his brow overclouded.

'A murder—here—beneath your roof?' exclaimed Father Cyprian.—'Who was the victim? and who the criminal?'

'The victim was a handsome young page, holy father,' was the reply; 'and the murderess was the most beautiful creature I ever set eyes upon.'

'And of course she is in custody?' said the priest, in a tone of inquiry.

'Indeed she is not, your reverence,' hastily interjected the landlady: 'and her escape is the most singular part of the whole business.'

But we should begin by informing you, holy father,' resumed the landlord, 'that about sunset, the day before yesterday, a party of well-mounted travellers rode up to our door. They consisted of a knight of handsome appearance, a youth clad in complete armor, and who by the bye was particularly cautious in concealing his face.

'Yes, for reasons which soon transpired,' exclaimed the hostess. 'Who would have thought he should have been bold and resolute enough to accomplish the escape of the three noble prisoners at Prague?'

'Ah!' ejaculated the Carthusian, with a sudden start. 'But do you know the name of the handsome knight to whom you alluded?' he demanded impatiently.

'Sir Ernest de Colmar, I believe,' answered the landlord.

'I thought so!' cried the priest.—'And the page who was murdered—did he belong to the suite of Sir Ernest?'

'Assuredly, your reverence,' responded the host: 'and as comely a youth he was as ever——'

'His name—his name?' demanded Father Cyprian, with an impatience that now amounted to a feverish excitement.

'Ermach,' was the answer.

'Holy Virgin! this is wonderful—wonderful!' exclaimed the priest, crossing himself: and then, even as his hand was yet sinking down from the performance of this act of devotion, an expression of diabolical satisfaction passed slowly over his countenance.

'Did you know aught of the deceased youth, holy father?' inquired the landlord, not being exactly aware what to think of the priest's excitement at the intelligence thus imparted to him.

'Yes; I was partially acquainted with him—poor boy!' was the reply, delivered with a sudden attempt to exhibit some degree of sympathy on behalf of the murdered youth. 'But you said that a lady of extraordinary beauty committed the crime——'

'And she has escaped,' observed the landlady.

'What was her name?' demanded the priest: 'who was she?'

'Her name is Gloria,' responded the hostess;' and she is the sister of the well-known Satanais?'

'Gloria!' repeated the Carthusian, every lineament of his countenance denoting the wildest astonishment: 'Gloria—the sister of Satanais, he said in a low and mechanical voice of increasing bewilderment. 'And she was travelling with Sir Ernest de Colmar?—and she was taken into custody, and she escaped you say?' he asked, with the manner of one who scarcely dares credit the evidence of his own ears.

'It is as I have told your reverence,' said the landlord. 'But pardon me, the effect produced upon you, holy father, by the intelligence,' continued the man with some degree of hesitation, 'makes me apprehend that some of the parties must be connected with you; perhaps in the ties of relationship——'

'No; not at all,' exclaimed the Carthusian: 'but I am acquainted with them to a certain extent. Hence the startling interest which this unexpected communication has excited in my mind. But tell me, worthy friend, how all this occurred.'

'I was already once about to explain to your reverence,' resumed the landlord. 'that a party consisting of the knight, the youth in armor, the Lady Gloria, the page Ermach, two handmaidens, and two grooms, arrived at the hostel about sunset the day before yesterday. In the middle of the night the Lady Gloria came knocking at our bedroom door and made me and my wife get up and follow her. She led us to

the chamber appropriated to the young page Ermach—and behold! the youth lay murdered in his couch! Your reverence may conceive our horror at the spectacle, and our amazement when that beautiful creature accused herself of being the assassin! The whole house was soon alarmed, and I of course made the Lady Gloria a close prisoner in her chamber. At sunrise the authorities came from the next town; and sentinels were posted to guard the prisoner's chamber. The magistrate took down the necessary depositions, and then visited the lady, who was attended by her handmaids.'

'Two sweet girls in appearance,' interjected the landlady.

'Pray proceed, worthy host,' exclaimed the Carthusian, whose curiosity was profoundly excited. 'The magistrate visited the Lady Gloria in her chamber——'

'And she begged that she might not be immediately moved to prison,' continued the landlord; 'declaring as a reason that she expected a visit from her sister the Lady Satanais Now every one has heard of this romantic and mysterious being: but that was the first occasion that I ever knew she had a sister at all.'

'I have been aware of the fact for some time,' observed the Carthusian.—'But pray proceed.'

'Well, holy father,' resumed the host, 'the kind-hearted old magistrate accorded the request made to him by the Lady Gloria, and permitted her to remain in her room at this hostel; but as a matter of course a sentinel was left under the window, and another posted at the door. And now comes the most extraordinary part of the whole affair. For all on a sudden the rumor flies through the establishment that the prisoner has escaped.

'She bribed a sentinel, perhaps?' suggested the Carthusian.

'I will not take it upon myself to say that she did or she did not,' observed the landlord. 'But the magistrate examined into the whole business——'

'And what did he make of it?' demanded the priest.

'Nothing,' was the response. 'That the Lady Satanais did really visit the inn, I myself can affirm, because I met her as she was leaving it; and I watched her until she disappeared round the corner of the grove which your reverence may observe from this window,' added the landlord, pointing towards the casement. 'Moreover, the man who was second on guard at the prisoner's chamber-door, likewise saw the Lady Satanais and spoke to her. In short, two witnesses deposed to seeing her *on her way out of the hostel*; but no one saw her *enter it*.'

'This is strange—most strange!' murmured Father Cyprian, suddenly falling into a profound reverie which lasted upwards of five minutes: and during that interval he seemed to be pursuing a particular idea which had struck him, and following it up with all the earnest attention and keen observation of a man who is determined to unravel a skein intricately complex, but to the disentanglement of which he nevertheless sees an issue. 'Be so kind as to give me the minutest and most perfect details of this extraordinary escape,' he at length said, awakening from his profound meditation and addressing himself to the landlord.

This individual proceeded to comply with the Carthusian's request; and he accordingly related all the evidence which had been given before the magistrate, and which we have duly recorded in the sixtieth chapter of our history. While he spoke, the priest appeared to weigh with deep deliberation every new link which he supplied to the chain of his narrative; sometimes he stopped him and made him repeat particular facts over again; then he bent his brows, bit his nether lip, and looked keenly before him with the air of a man who is plunging his mental vision through a maze of bewildering and even contradictory circumstances, in order to seek the glimmering of the real truth at the end of that avenue of ideas; and lastly, when the landlord had ceased speaking, the Carthusian sprang from his chair, exclaiming, 'By heaven, it must be so! Yes—*that* is the solution of the enigma; I see it all—I comprehend every thing now! The mystery of those two sisters——Ah! it is no longer a mystery to me! Fool, fool that I was, never to suspect the truth till now! O Marietta! the serpent excels thee not in cunning; but now—Oh! *now*, I shall soon be revenged!'

And thus musing aloud as he paced to and fro with a strange excitement of manner, the Carthusian forgot that he was either observed or overheard.

At length, suddenly perceiving that the landlord and landlady were contemplating him with an earnest curiosity,

he stopped short in his hurried and uneven walk, composed his countenance—on which an expression of fiendish malice and infernal triumph had again spread—and observed in a sort of explanatory tone, 'You have related events at which my soul has been deeply moved, inasmuch as I am acquainted with all the personages concerned.'

'But your reverence has not yet heard of the arrest of the young gentleman in the steel armor,' said the landlady.

'Ah! what, is he in custody?' exclaimed the Carthusian.

'Not at all,' responded the hostess, who was now determined to have a little of the talk to herself, her husband having enjoyed his full share. 'He *was* arrested, though, and on a charge of having effected the liberation of the three State prisoners from the Castle of Prague; but after a private examination, the magistrate set him free with only a small fine, and he went quietly and comfortably away with Sir Ernest de Colmar.'

'Of course the knight knows who he is?' said the Carthusian interrogatively.

'Really I believe he does not, holy father,' replied the landlady; 'for although the magistrate was close enough in respect to what had taken place at the private examination, the lieutenant who commanded the Taborite guard, got pretty communicative when my husband invited him into this room at the close of the proceedings, and set a flask of wine before him. He then told us that the young gentleman in armor had positively refused to mention who he was or what was his name; and that Sir Ernest de Colmar had declared his ignorance thereof, but had spoken highly of his valor and generosity of heart. I am the more inclined to believe in this ignorance on the knight's part,' continued the landlady,' because on the same evening that the party arrived at our house, Ermach—alas! poor youth, he little thought at the time that he was destined never to behold another sunrise!—but, as I was saying, Ermach came into this room and began to chatter with me and my husband; and in the course of conversation he observed that a deep mystery surrounded the young gentleman in the complete suit of armor—but what the mystery was, he could not for the life of him guess. So said Ermach, I can assure your reverence; and he moreover declared that Sir Ernest de Colmar was not only ignorant of the young gentleman's name, but had not even beheld his countenance. Hence is it apparent enough that the knight told the truth to the magistrate.'

'Clearly so,' observed the Carthusian. 'But time is waxing on,' he suddenly exclaimed, 'and our party must once more get to horse. Will you command the steeds to be brought forth from the stables, worthy host?'

'This instant, holy father,' was the prompt reply; and the landlord hastened forth into the court-yard of the establishment to issue the requisite commands to the hostlers.

'One more cup of cordial, may it please your reverence?' said the landlady in a tone of gentle entreaty.

'I thank you for your kindness,' answered the priest; but I dare not accept it. My head is not the strongest in the world, so far as liquor is concerned. By the bye,' he added, a sudden thought striking him as he was about to quit the room, 'what became of the two handmaidens whom your husband represented as being attendant on the Lady Gloria?'

'They continued their journey southward, in company with Sir Ernest de Colmar,' replied the hostess.

'Ah! I understand,' ejaculated the priest, as if this information corresponded with a certain idea which he had formed and which was now uppermost in his mind; then, as he issued from the bar-parlor, he murmured to himself, 'Yes, everything confirms my suspicion and proves that I have read the mystery aright! And now, Marietta, tremble—Oh! tremble, Sister Marietta; for in spite of all thy devices—aye, and in spite of all the protecting influence which the Captain-General of the Taborites may cast around thee, will I be signally avenged!'

Thus murmured the Carthusian priest to himself as he proceeded from the bar-parlor to the court-yard, in order to ascertain if the steeds were caparisoned and in readiness for the continuation of the journey. But instead of beholding anything satisfactory in that respect, he was struck with mingled surprise and curiosity at observing the landlord and all his dependants, together with the eight armed servitors of the Bronze Statue, the mutes, the postilions, and the pages, all crowding around a traveller who had apparently just arrived at the inn—for he was still holding in

his hand the bridle of the steed whence he had dismounted.

'What tidings are these which seem to possess so absorbing an interest?' demanded the Carthusian of the landlord, whom he drew aside from the group.

'Tidings, your reverence, of terrible import!' ejaculated the host. 'That traveller, who is holding forth to the earnest listeners, has ridden at good speed from Prague, and he reports that the Taborite crusade against the Aristocracy is proclaimed!'

'What mean you?' cried the priest. 'Has John Zitzka's presumption carried him thus far——'

'Hush, holy father,' said the landlord, in an imploring tone; 'for some of my own dependents are inclined to favor the reformers, and they may overhear you.'

'But what are the precise tidings from Prague?' demanded the Carthusian.

'That the Captain General reviewed all the Taborite garrison yesterday at noon, in the great square of the metropolis,' said the host; 'and that he proclaimed a war to the death against the Bohemian aristocracy!'

'Then is the gauntlet already thrown down, and the civil strife dates from yesterday throughout the land,' said Father Cyprian, in a deep and solemn voice.

'What mean you, holy sir?' cried the landlord, surveying him with mingled astonishment and alarm.

'Nothing—nothing; you will full soon comprehend me well,' replied the priest, his tone and manner suddenly indicating the excitement of impatience. 'But I pray thee to order those idle varlets of thine to have out the horses.'

'In ten minutes everything shall be ready for your departure, holy father,' said the landlord; and he hastened to issue the necessary commands, while the priest returned to the room where he had left the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baron of Altendorf.

'You have been long absent,' exclaimed the latter: 'and we were already fearful that something of a disagreeable nature was thus detaining your reverence. But what have you succeeded in learning!'

'Many things of vital importance to ourselves,' responded the priest. 'In the first place, we have nothing to fear at the hands of Ermach; he is no more! In the second place, Sir Ernest de Colmar is scarcely a day's journey in advance of us upon the great southern road, as he tarried at this same hostel on his way and only quitted it at two o'clock yesterday. In the third place a certain Marietta, whom your lordships may remember, and whose anger has recently menaced our institution to some extent, will no doubt become a victim to the Bronze Statue. And in the fourth place,' added the Carthusian priest, his voice becoming more solemn and his manner more impressive, 'John Zitzka has proclaimed a war to the death against the aristocracy of Bohemia!'

'These tidings are indeed important!' exclaimed the Marquis of Schomberg.

'But whence did you glean so much in so short a time?' demanded the Baron of Altendorf.

'I will give your lordships full explanations anon,' said the priest; 'for the horses are by this time in readiness, and after the intelligence which we have just received relative to the audacious conduct of the Taborite General, the sooner we reach Altendorf Castle, the better.'

'Assuredly so,' said both the marquis and the baron, as they closed the vizors of their helmets.

And at the expiration of ten minutes, the funereal procession moved rapidly away from the hostel, in the same order which characterised its arrival, and which we have already depicted.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE REVIEW OF THE TABORITE ARMY.

Yes—the information which had reached the inn relative to the proceedings of John Zitzka, was indeed correct; and the Captain-General of the Taborites had proclaimed war against the monarchists and the aristocrats of Bohemia.

Pause we for a moment to direct the attention of our readers to that grand and imposing scene, when the mighty Zitzka reviewed his army in the great square of Prague.

The weather was superb—such weather as usually characterises the close of August, and from which the grape receives its richest purple, the peach its purest vermeil, and the apricot its deepest yellow—all these being the signs of that season when the golden harvests are garnered from the fields and the emerald vesture of the groves

begins to be streaked and dotted with the brown tints of Autumn.

And it was at the hour of noon, on such a day as this, that the sounds of martial music echoed through the streets and around the walls of Prague, and that the serried bands of stern Reformers marched to the great square to receive the idol of their hearts—John Zitzka, the one-eyed Captain of Mount Tabor.

Upwards of twenty thousand men were thus assembled at the review; and all the streets leading thither, all the casements, balconies, and house-tops overlooking the spot, all the towers, domes, and pinnacles, whence the eye could command the scene, were crowded with the inhabitants of the Bohemian capital. For the most intense curiosity animated the citizens, diffusing the excitement of a vivid interest throughout all grades of society, and all quarters of the metropolis, prompting even infirm old men and weak women to dare the tremendous pressure and jostling of the gathered myriads of spectators, in order to obtain a glimpse of the proceedings which were to mark a day so memorable in the history of Bohemia.

For it had been whispered abroad from an early hour in the morning that General Zitzka would harangue his troops and proclaim his intentions; and conjecture, pluming its wings with the impulse of uncertainty, had soared from a thousand points, and in as many different directions, but only to bring back on the pinions of fancy a variety of rumors of the most conflicting nature.—And thus a vague terror was associated with that feeling of curiosity which led the inhabitants of Prague, rich and poor, high and low, male and female, to flock in such dense multitudes towards the great square, and to occupy every point where the foot could establish a standing place, and whence the eye could obtain a glimpse of the proceedings.

But apart from all those feelings of mingled apprehension and suspense which thus inspired the citizens of Prague, the spectacle itself was one well calculated to engender a deep interest. The Taborite warriors were well armed and disciplined: their appearance was characterized by a cleanliness and a physical comfort which placed them in strong contrast with the usual stamp of wretchedly-fed and ill-clothed soldiery of that age; and upon their countenances might be traced a sternness of purpose mingled with fanatic enthusiasm, which combined expression was however subdued by a predominant air of patriarchal simplicity.—They were armed for the most part with steel caps and corselets, and the usual offensive weapons at that time in vogue; but the officers all had heavy petronels, or pistols, stuck in their belts. The cavalry were well-mounted; and although few in number, they constituted an effective corps which no enemy could estimate lightly. Several pieces of cannon increased the strength of Zitzka's military resources; and there was likewise a band of sappers, armed with mighty axes which would either clear a road through a forest or a bloody path in the ranks of battle.

Above the heads of this formidable array floated the innumerable light blue standards bearing in gilt letters the rallying word—Tabor. But in the midst of the army there was borne a vast banner of crimson-silk, suspended to two poles, and inscribed with the sainted name of John Huss.

Upon all this martial scene shone the refulgent sun from a sky of cloudless blue; and in the powerful lustre glittered the helm and spear, corselet and lance, sword and battle-axe, while the thrilling music sounded loud and cheerily through the heavy, listless air.

Precisely at noon a cannon was fired from the castle to announce that the Captain-General was sallying forth to repair to the grand parade-ground; and the Taborite forces were drawn up in readiness to receive him. In a few minutes every eye was turned towards a particular spot where the troops, who were marshalled in lines round the square, fell back suddenly; and through the opening thus formed, John Zitzka rode into the centre of the arena.

But how came that mighty chieftain? and who constituted his train?

Attended only by two pages did he come; nor was his progress marked by the pomp, the ostentation, and the grandeur which follow the kings, and queens, and other false gods of the earth.

No rich apparel did he wear,—no jewels glistened on his martial raiment. His brow was surmounted not with a velvet cap and ostrich plumes, but was pressed with the good steel head-steel that had turned aside many a sharp sabre in the midst of battle; and his body, clothed with no silken doublet,

was swathed in the stern cold iron which alone seemed fit to defend that stalwart breast. The only ornament which he wore was a handsome ring, and that was a gift from one whose chivalrous character and splendid exploits he so highly admired, for it was the ring which he had received from Sir Ernest de Colmar, that the Captain-General of the Taborites thus displayed upon his finger.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which Zitzka was received by his army. At first, the moment he entered the square, the loud and simultaneous explosion of twenty thousand voices gave forth an acclaim so tremendous in its welcome and so deafening in its fervid cordiality that it appeared to roll like thunder through the vault of heaven; and the echoes were aroused to prompt response even to the uttermost parts of the Bohemian capital. Then there was a pause,—a dead silence, resembling that which follows the real thunder of the spheres; but in a few moments the enthusiasm of the Taborites burst forth again in cries of welcome, shouts of joy, and cheers that vibrated with the heartfelt fervor which inspired them. Company after company—division after division—corps after corps—took up the succession of thrilling acclaims, which thus sounded upon the ear like repeated volleys of artillery following closely upon each other.

At length the voices of the troops at the farther extremity of the square died away; and a profound stillness fell upon the scene.

But in a few moments this solemn silence was broken by the loud, sonorous, commanding voice of John Zitzka, who, having reined in his steed in the centre of the square, now addressed his armament in these terms:

'Beloved children of Mount Tabor,—you have filled my heart with the most grateful enthusiasm! Those prolonged shouts wherewith you have welcomed me, bear testimony to the feeling which animates your souls! That feeling touches a chord vibrating responsively in my own heart; and I know thereby that your thoughts and mine are identical. Ye are the instruments chosen by heaven to work out grand objects and accomplish striking changes! The iniquities of crowned rulers, usurping aristocrats, and selfish priests have so disordered the social system, that nothing but the sword can exterminate abuses and abrogate wrongs. The millions have experienced miseries accumulating upon miseries—oppressions heaped upon oppressions,—tyrannies multiplying upon tyrannies, until they are crushed beneath the colossal edifice which superstition, king-craft, aristocracy, and monopoly have thus built up. The sword can alone undo all the evil which violence and misrule have done. Patience has become a crime—endurance is a proof of grovelling cowardice. The great ones of the earth have crushed, scourged, persecuted, and plundered you to their heart's content; and ye would deserve the curse and the stigma which belong to all willing slaves, were ye to accept as a boon those terms which ye may dictate as a right. For the laws of God, the instincts of Nature, and the common sense of Man, all revolt against the system which kings, priests, and aristocrats have established. By this system the many are made the slaves of the few; and these few are in general the vilest oppressors, the most degraded debauchees, or the greatest criminals that ever disgraced the human species. They have monopolised all power and all privileges. They have seized upon the land and not only divided it amongst themselves during their life-time, but have decreed that it shall descend to their children and their children's children, from generation to generation; and thus have they carried their presumption and their injustice to such a pitch as to dispose of the future for the benefit of their posterity, and foredoom to beggary the millions that are as yet unborn. Children of Mount Tabor! heaven's curse is upon the authors of this monstrous iniquity; and as the hereditary usurpers have raised up, maintained, and propagated their system by the sword, then by the sword let them be punished! 'Tis for you, my children, to destroy the vile despotism which has existed for ages, but which no measure of antiquity can justify. For if your ancestors have been willing slaves, 'tis no reason that you should consent to wear the chains which they have hugged; nor can one generation bind that which is to follow. The earth belongs to all who are alive upon it; and every individual has a right to receive a subsistence from the soil. The land must be made to produce enough bread to feed *all*, before any of it is used to grow grapes to make wine for *a few*. Pauperism must be extirpated, before any individual can be

allowed to enjoy luxuries. Those who work the hardest, have the first claim to fare the best, when the proper time comes to talk of anything better than a mere subsistence. But in the first instance all men must be ensured that subsistence, before any one soul can be permitted to demand *more*. These are the solemn truths which I now proclaim as the Taborite profession of faith; these are the doctrines which I enunciate as a believer in the Christian system and in that Supreme Being who is the God of justice as well as the God of battles!'

Zitzka paused to gather breath, and the entire army of reformers, hitherto retained in the spell-bound silence of an intense and absorbing interest, suddenly burst forth into acclamations as full of enthusiasm, and as unfeignedly sincere as those which had ere now welcomed the presence of their Captain-General.

'Children of Mount Tabor,' continued the mighty chief, when the prolonged plaudits had at length ceased, 'again do I receive from your lips the unmistakeable evidence that our thoughts are identical, and that you accept with unanimity the profession of faith which I have just proclaimed. Behold, then, my glorious army, the time for action! The moment is arrived—the opportunity presents itself! The murder of John Huss shall be avenged; and even from the grave shall his spirit pursue the thronged miscreants, the mitred assassins, and the fiendish nobles that doomed him to the stake! I have already shown too much forbearance, and the aristocracy of Bohemia have availed themselves of my mercy, to plot and conspire against our holy cause. But now, aroused from that dream of mistaken humanity, I draw the sword, I cast away the scabbard, and I proclaim a war of extermination against the people's tyrants and oppressors!'

Again did the Taborite forces manifest their sympathetic feelings in prolonged shouts of fervid enthusiasm; and while some of the spectators joined in the applause, others exchanged amongst themselves looks of dismay. For the friends of freedom were well pleased with the resolution to which Zitzka had come; whereas the upholders of abuses and the relatives, creatures, and dependants of the aristocracy, were filled with despair.

'Children of Mount Tabor,' once more spoke John Zitzka, his powerful and sonorous voice rising above the cheers and acclamations, as the thunder rolls over the bosom of the sounding main; 'Children of Mount Tabor,' he repeated, slowly waving his arm to enjoin silence, and in obedience to that signal every other voice was hushed in an instant, and a profound stillness fell upon the army and the spectators;—'Children of Mount Tabor,' he said a third time, 'the cause which we have in hand is twofold: it is that of true religion and of political justice. We assert the primitive simplicity of the Christian creed, and the purity of republican institutions. We will restore the former and establish the latter. Our mission is one of progress, civilization and justice; but the machinations and intrigues of the enemies of all those principles, compel us to fulfil our vicarious errand by means of the sword.—Be not therefore deterred from action when the aristocracy shall denounce you as a horde of ruffians, inciting civil war in your native land, 'Tis they who have driven you to the desperation which compels you to enter upon the path of strife! 'Tis they who have goaded you on to resistance. Every drop of blood which may now be shed stamps the stain of murder upon their brows. You will be fighting in self-defence, against the titled few who have made you their slaves, from time immemorial, and who seek to perpetuate your bondage unto the end. You will be warring not only for your own sakes, but for those of your children and your your children's children. Arise, then, my brave and noble minded champions of truth and justice—arise, and let the standard of Mount Tabor float above the battlemented towers of every feudal fortalice in Bohemia!'

Zitzka, the One-eyed, ceased, and from the great square of Prague arose a shout so tremendous in its din, and so terrible in the stern resolution which it expressed, that never did the harangue of a chieftain receive a more cordial acclaim on the part of an army. That mighty voice, in which spoke twenty thousand daring men, vibrated through the ambient air, and made the very canopy of heaven ring; and again and again thundered the enthusiastic cheer, rising from the serried ranks as if the artillery itself were exploding, and rolling on and on, wave upon wave of deafening sound, until it seemed as if the very atmosphere had become an ocean sonorous with the billows of the storm.

By degrees that portentous expres-

sion of Taborite enthusiasm died away, and then the army began to march past the Captain-General.

The banners waved, the martial music sent forth a lively air, and the steeds of the cavalry pranced as if in pride at sharing in the martial spectacle. And as company after company, and troop after troop, passed by the spot where John Zitzka was posted, every banner was lowered and every weapon pointed downward, in military salutation of the mighty chief.

At length the review terminated, the Captain-General rode back to the castle, attended by his two pages, the troops were marched away to their quarters, the spectators dispersed, and Prague was comparatively tranquil in appearance once more.

Yes, but only *in appearance*; for a terrible and painful excitement prevailed in numerous dwellings, where the friends or adherents of the proscribed aristocracy were making secret but hasty preparations for a prompt flight from the city, in order to join their patrons at the feudal fortresses whither those nobles had already retired, on the breaking up of the council three weeks previously.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE CAPTAIN-GENERAL OF THE TABORITES.

It was about six o'clock in the evening of the same day on which the review had taken place, and John Zitzka was seated in his own private apartment at the Castle of Prague, examining a large map whereon all the feudal strongholds, mansions, and domains of the Bohemian aristocracy were marked with the minutest precision.

Zitzka was alone; and as the slanting beams of the sun penetrated from the western heaven into the room, they imparted a ruddy glow to the stern countenance, which derived an almost sinister and ferocious expression from its closed eye-lid, and abundance of rough black hair.

But at the present moment the Captain-General was absorbed in the deepest thought, as he contemplated the map spread out before him, and as he travelled with his fore-finger from place to place on its colored surface. While thus occupied, he from time to time made memoranda on a slip of paper, and audible musings frequently escaped his lips.

'The die is thrown—the Rubicon is passed,' he murmured to himself; 'and Bohemia must now behold a civil war, a war to the very death! Yes, I have proclaimed the crusade; and the announcement must be followed up by vigorous action. Thank heaven! Austria is paralyzed: and thus the only power which was likely to adopt an armed intervention in the affairs of Bohemia, is absolutely silenced and incapacitated from meddling in the matter for at least a period of one year. Ah! it was a masterly stroke of policy which placed Austria in that condition, muzzling her as it were all in a moment, and by means unseen by the world at large! Yes, for one year is she bound to remain an idle and passive spectatress of all that may pass upon the stage of Bohemian politics. And in this interval, may heaven grant that I may become the successful instrument to work out the regeneration of the long-oppressed millions in this land! For thou knowest, O Lord,' exclaimed Zitzka, now speaking aloud and raising his look upward, while his whole countenance expressed the unfeigned devotion which filled his heart, 'thou knowest that I am sincere in all that I have undertaken, and that no sentiment of personal ambition has inspired me even for a single instant! And if at the commencement,' proceeded the Captain-General, now joining his hands and casting down his look with an air of the deepest humility and most profound contrition,—'if at the commencement of this mighty movement, I was instigated somewhat by a desire to avenge a cruel wrong, sustained by one whom I loved so tenderly, and still cherish so dearly,—if it were indeed the sense of that poignant injury which aroused me to the contemplation of ecclesiastical voluptuousness and priestly turpitude,—and if that tremendous outrage did in the beginning animate me with a devouring desire and a fierce craving for vengeance, nevertheless, thou wilt pardon me, O Lord of Hosts—thou wilt remember the weakness of the human heart, O Power Supreme! For I will restore thine altar to its pristine purity, and I will bring back thy worship to the simplicity of its early being; I will purge thy church of the monstrous abuses which the wickedness and selfishness of men have introduced therein; and I will

teach the Bohemian people to embrace and practise that Christianity which our Blessed Saviour himself taught in the beginning, but which has become degraded by pomp, ostentation, and luxuriousness, into the veriest heathenism.'

The voice of the Captain-General had risen to a high key in proportion as his feelings grew excited with indignation; and leaving his seat, he began to pace the room with uneven steps.

'Yes, my motives are pure— my intentions good and holy,' he continued, in a musing tone, sometimes speaking aloud, and then lowering his voice to a whisper; 'and whatever may be the result of this struggle, the world shall have no cause to declare that petty motives of selfishness urged me on! No —oh! no; for ambition is dead in my sepulchral heart—that heart whose first affections were blighted, withered—— But, ah! wherefore now revive the memory of that perished love of mine? wherefore dive to recover that pearl of sentiments which, during long years, I have endeavored to consign to the profoundest depths of the waters of oblivion? O, Ermenonda, thine image forces itself at times upon my contemplation, and this is one of those moments which unman me!'

But with his hand of iron sinews the stalwart warrior dashed away a tear from his eye; then, as if to seek refuge in some earnest occupation from the tide of reminiscences which had begun to roll in upon his brain, he resumed his seat and continued his examination of the large map spread out upon the table.

'To garrison all these places,' he said, in that same musing tone in which he had originally spoken, 'will demand a large force; besides which, from many of the aristocratic strongholds I must expect resistance, and then will come the waste of time and troops in siege and beleaguerment. But what of the fortalices and mansions in the village of Prague?' he asked himself, at the same time carrying his finger slowly round the spot where the Bohemian metropolis was marked upon the map. 'Here is the princely dwelling-place of the Marquis of Schomberg. But he has fled, and a handful of my gallant Taborites will be sufficient to occupy this house. Then what have we here? The White Mansion, inhabited by the Baroness Hamelen. Ah! rumor declares that she is an excellent woman, abounding in charity and benevolence. But she is a known devotee to the Catholic faith, as well as a worshipper of royalty. And now that I bethink me of these circumstances, I remember that the name of the Baroness Hamelen, when one day accidentally mentioned in Gloria's presence, caused her to experience a sudden excitement of so lively and strange a nature that I was alarmed. But she alleged the invariable excuse of women who wish to conceal the real nature of the thoughts which have surprised them into the exhibition of sudden emotions; yes, she pleaded a transitory indisposition, and when I demanded if she were acquainted with the Baroness Hamelen, and if so, what she knew concerning her, she turned upon me a look full of artlessness, and declared that she was utterly unknown to that lady. But, ah! that was not the first nor the only occasion on which I suspected that Gloria cherished secrets of a deep, dark, and terrible nature—secrets which she has not dared reveal even to me, who am, nevertheless, acquainted with that *one* tremendous incident in her life which— But here am I suffering my thoughts to wander again from the important topic which alone ought to concentrate them; and as the Captain-General thus interrupted himself with a tone of vexation, he fixed his looks upon the map more intently than ever. 'The White Mansion is a mere dwelling-house,' he continued in his musings; 'and I need not place even a single soldier there. But, ah! here we have Hamelen Castle—a stronghold in the immediate neighborhood, and belonging too to the same noble lady. What says my private memorandum-book relative to this place?'

And as Zitzka thus musingly interrogated himself, he unlocked a draw in the table at which he was sitting, and thence drew forth a small set of tablets fastened with a clasp. These he inspected for a few moments, and speedily lighted upon the special entry, or memorandum, for which he was seeking.

'Here it is!' he said, in the same humor and tone of self-communing as before; 'and what do we glean therefrom? "Hamelen Castle, belonging to the baroness of the same name; a strong place; underwent important repairs a few years ago, and is supposed to have vast subterranean passages. The castle is now inhabited by a number of young men, maintained at the cost and through the benevolence of

the Baroness Hamelen. A priest presides over this male community. Several armed men have frequently been observed in the neighborhood: sometimes they are reported to have worn black masks. But this statement is attributed to the exaggerations of superstitio is terror or the wilful misrepresentatious of malice." Thus speaks the memorandum, gleaned from an honest Taborite who knows the neighborhood of Hamelen Castle well. The baroness is a bigot in religion and a strong partizan in politics, and therefore is she a dangerous woman. The castle is strong, and might be made the rallying point for monarchists and aristocrats. I will send a force of two hundred Taborites to occupy it to-morrow morning, at the same time that the Marquis of Schomberg's villa shall be garrisoned; and those proceedings will be the first acts of the civil war!'

Scarcely had Zitzka arrived at this resolution, when a Taborite attendant slowly opened the door of the apartment, and with an evident apprehension of disturbing his chief, he said, 'General, a lady solicits an immediate audience.'

'Did you not refer her to the secretary?' inquired Zitzka; 'seeing that I am particularly engaged with my present occupation.'

'I did,' answered the Taborite; 'but she declared that her business was urgent and regarded only the Captain-General.'

'Then admit her,' said Zitzka.

The Taborite attendant withdrew, and in a few minutes a lady of tall stature and fine form, bnt closely veiled, stood in the presence of the Captain-General.

For several seconds she stood surveying him through the thick gauze which covered her countenance, and then, apparently recollecting herself, she said, 'Pardon this intrusion, great chief, and accord me your attention for a little space.'

Thus speaking, she threw back the veil, and Zitzka beheld a countenance magnificently handsome, but in every lineament of which was expressed a profound terror that she evidently strove to conceal.

The Captain-General begged her to take a seat, at the same time resuming his own chair with a manner indicating his willingness to grant her his attention, but in the hope that her explanations would be prompt and to the point.

'General Zitzka,' said the lady, speaking with considerable hesitation, and evidently laboring under the weight of mingled embarrassment and apprehension, 'I am come as a suppliant for your forbearance and mercy, and yet I hardly know in what terms to proffer my prayer; for I am not a partisan of your cause—I have indeed been an enemy to it, and my name is perhaps unfavorably known to you——'

'Who are you, lady?' inquired Zitzka, in as gentle and re-assuring a tone as he could possibly assume.

'I am the Baroness Hamelen,' said the lady, giving utterance to the words with an effort, and then shrinking, as it were, within herself through the sudden paroxysm of terror that she experienced in the evident dread lest the announcement of her name should produce a startling effect upon the Captain-General.

'Ah! I was just thinking of your ladyshie at the moment when you sent to demand an audience,' said Zitzka, with his wonted imperturbility of manner.

'Indeed!—you were thinking of *me?*' exclaimed the baroness, his unchanging countenance and calm utterance affording her the most unspeakable relief, as if she fancied that she had just stood the chance of provoking the ire of a fiend, but had happily escaped the tremendous risk.

'Yes, lady, I was thinking of you,' repeated the General, observing that there was something strange in her manner, but attributing it solely to the embarrassment which so noted a Catholic and monarchist was likely to experience in the presence of himself—the chief of the reformers. 'Indeed, to speak candidly,' he added, after a moment's pause, 'I had just resolved to send early in the morning and demand the keys of Hamelen Castle.'

And during that same moment's pause, the baroness had said exultingly to herself, 'My apprehensions were unfounded—he suspects not the terrible truth, and Marietta, or Gloria, has kept the secret inviolably!'

'But you need fear nothing, lady,' continued the grim chief, 'if you yield immediate compliance with my demand and admit a Taborite garrison into your castle; for in desiring the keys of all strongholds to be delivered up to me, I mean only to test the disposition of those feudal owners and seignorial proprietors who may be thus summoned,

and not to throw any insult or indignity upon them.'

'But is it possible that you mean to establish a body of your troops within the walls of my castle?' exclaimed the baroness. 'Indeed, mighty Zitzka, it was to confer with you upon this very subject that I resolved to seek your presence; and I ventured to hope that the Taborite General was endowed with a generosity and a chivalrous gallantry which would induce him to exercise forbearance towards a weak and harmless woman.'

'Your ladyship has already received my assurance that no harm shall befal you—no insult be offered either to yourself or any one dwelling beneath your roof,' said Zitzka; 'provided that your adherents abstain from molestation towards the soldiers whom I shall send to occupy Hamelen Castle.'

'And it is precisely against such occupation that I am come to plead,' observed the baroness. 'Will you not take my solemn pledge of neutrality? will you not place confidence in me, when I declare my resolution to abstain from all interference in the affairs of my unhappy country?'

'Lady,' responded Zitzka, in a firm but courteous tone, 'it grieves me to refuse a boon to any suppliant of your sex. But in the present instance my duty commands me to prove inexorable. Your ladyship is known to be devoted to the Romish Church and likewise an enthusiastic admirer of monarchical institutions. Moreover, your ladyship possesses a strong fortalice in the neighborhood of the metropolis—a fortalice,' continued Zitzka, referring to his memorandum book as he spoke, 'which contains vast subterranean passages, and in the vicinage of which armed men wearing masks have been frequently observed.'

The baroness suddenly became pale as death, as Zitzka, raising his eye from the book, fixed it upon her with a searching keenness. She endeavored to compose herself, but so great was her agitation, so profound her confusion, that the words which she sought to utter seemed to stick in her throat, and she felt as if she were about to be suffocated.

'Therefore,' continued Zitzka, whose suspicions were naturally excited by that mingled terror and embarrassment which could only spring from some serious cause, 'your ladyship cannot be astonished, nor must you deem me harsh, if I persist in my resolve to order the immediate occupation of Hamelen Castle.'

'General Zitzka,' said the baroness, now subduing by a tremendous effort the outward expression of her emotions, 'the proceeding which you threaten to adopt will break up all the benevolent and philanthropic arrangements which it has been my pride and my pleasure to carry into effect at Hamelen Castle.'

'My soldiers, lady, will receive positive instructions to forbear from even the slightest interference in the domestic economy of your establishment.—And as you yourself reside at the White Mansion,' added the Captain-General, still watching every movement and varying expression of her countenance, 'the presence of two hundred soldiers of Mount Tabor at the castle cannot prove a source of any molestation to your ladyship.'

'Can nothing induce you to treat me with forbearance and leave me in the quiet enjoyment of a peaceful tenure of existence?' exclaimed the baroness, her tone and manner both expressing a more agonising spirit of entreaty than she herself either intended or could control.

'Lady,' said John Zitzka, his voice assuming a severity which made her blood run cold to her heart, 'there is something weighing upon your mind—and if you seek a boon at my hands, you must deserve it by placing implicit confidence in me.'

'What do you mean?' cried the baroness, hastily; and, instantly catching at the idea which the General's words excited all in a moment in her mind, she said in a low tone and with a significant look, 'You require guarantees and proofs that I will cease to be an enemy of the Taborite cause?'

The first feeling which this unmistakeable hint created in the mind of Zitzka, was one of supreme disgust at the selfishness of the woman who thus plainly intimated her readiness to desert the cause and the creed she had so long espoused and join the Taborite faith and system; but instantly smothering any expression of that loathing, the Captain-General's second impulse was to adopt a politic course and ascertain how far the baroness could possibly be useful to his projects.

'The Taborite tents are open to all who willingly seek them,' he accordingly observed. 'But if those who thus appear amongst us, come from the

dwellings of the enemy, common sense enjoins us to adopt all proper precautions in receiving such new proselytes.'

'But if those proselytes offer unequivocal guarantees,' said the baroness, her voice assuming a more confidential whisper, and her looks a deeper significancy, 'you will then be disposed to yield them your confidence and treat them accordingly?'

'Assuredly,' answered Zitzka, perceiving that the baroness was gradually and cautiously feeling her way towards a particular point. 'I have proclaimed a crusade against the Bohemian Aristocracy,' he continued, 'and my troops have expressed their adhesion to the measure.'

'I am well aware—too well aware of all that has occurred this day,' said the baroness, 'and it was in consequence thereof that I sought your presence.'

'But in proclaiming that crusade,' resumed the Captain-General, 'I have not menaced an indiscriminate slaughter. No,—where blood is shed, the blame must lie at the door of those who offer resistance; but mercy, forbearance, and leniency will be shown towards those who make a timely submission and yield to a destiny which they cannot control.'

'Then in me, mighty chieftain,' exclaimed the baroness, 'behold one of those who deem it right to adopt the more prudent alternative.'

'What am I to understand by your ladyship's observation?' inquired Zitzka, still maintaining his wonted imperturbability.

'Ah! do you not already understand me?' exclaimed the Baroness Hamelen; 'or will you compel me to descend to the painful minuteness of a detailed explanation? Well, be it so: the first step in the path of desertion from one's ancient creed, is always fraught with humiliation.'

'There is no humiliation, lady,' said Zitzka, 'in abandoning an erroneous and worn-out system, to adopt a true one whose star is in the ascendant; nor is there any shame in yielding where resistance would be useless.'

'The sternness of truth marks your language, great chieftain,' rejoined the baroness. 'Let me therefore at once throw myself upon your generosity, your goodness, and your mercy; let me confess that I have been the uncompromising opponent of the Taborite cause, and that I have abhorred both the religious reformation and the political changes which you advocate! Yes, all this do I confess with a candor and a frankness which, I fondly hope, will inspire you with confidence towards me. Nay, more—I am willing to admit that I should have perhaps clung to my old opinions and ancient prejudices unto the end, had not your proceeding of this day startled me as if a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet, and aroused me to the contemplation of the real aspect of Bohemian affairs. And the rapid survey which I have taken within the last few hours has opened my eyes to the conviction that might and power are on your side, and that by those means must you triumph. In this foreshadowing of the future, I behold the finger of Providence; and I have therefore come to the conclusion that truth and justice must be on the side of that man who is thus unmistakeably destined to overthrow systems and annihilate institutions which have endured for ages.'

'Your reasoning, lady, has been consistent with sound sense,' observed Zitzka, who was now disposed to give the baroness credit for more sincerity than he had at first imagined, instead of fathoming all the sophistry of her language and the artfulness of her conduct. 'And the result of your self-communings,' he added, 'has been a resolve to give in your adhesion to the Taborite cause?'

'Even so,' answered the Baroness.

'But your ladyship even now spoke of guarantees and proofs of sincerity?' said Zitzka, in a tone of inquiry.

'I did so,' rejoined the baroness; 'because I am prepared to throw myself body and soul into your cause—but I demand your implicit confidence in return. In a word, mighty Zitzka,' she added significantly,—'I have it in my power to render you an immense service, if you will promise to grant the recompense which I may demand.'

'Name alike the service and the reward,' said the stern and imperturbable Taborite; 'and I will answer your ladyship yea or nay in a moment.'

'And if the response be *nay*,' observed the lady, 'am I to consider that my proposal shall be buried in the strictest secrecy—as if indeed it had never been made?'

'Be that the understanding between us,' replied the Captain-General. 'And now speak frankly and fearlessly.'

'First I will specify my conditions,' said the baroness; 'because if they should be found exorbitant, and there-

fore be rejected, it will then be unnecessary to name at all the service which I propose to render.'

'And those conditions,' said Zitzka, 'what are they?'

'First, that you abstain from placing any garrison in Hamelen Castle, or interfering with those persons who are now residing there. Secondly,' continued the baroness, 'that in any partition of landed property which you may hereafter make, you leave my estates untouched. Thirdly, that for whatever intrigues, machinations, or schemes, I may have been implicated in, up to the present moment, you accord me a full and complete pardon. And fourthly, that you grant an equally unconditional forgiveness and manumission to a certain nobleman whom I shall hereafter name. These are my terms, General Zitzka.'

'And assuredly they are of a nature to which I could only assent on account of some service of the most important character, rendered not to me, personally, but to the Taborite cause in general. Under such circumstances,' added Zitzka, 'I will guarantee the fulfilment of those conditions which your ladyship has laid down.'

'Good!' exclaimed the Baroness, her magnificent features lighting up with joy, and her deep blue eyes dilating and flashing with triumph. 'I now entertain not the slightest apprehension,' she continued, 'that you will look upon my demands as disproportionate with the service which I am prepared to perform.'

'And that service?' said Zitzka, inquiringly.

'The surrender of the Princess Elizabetha and her treasures into your hands!' responded Lady Hamelen, in a low but resolute voice.

'Ah! then the subterraneans of your castle have been doubtless turned to a good use?' exclaimed Zitzka.

'As there is a God above us, mighty chief,' said the baroness, in a tone full of sincerity and confidence, 'neither the princess nor her treasures are concealed beneath my roof. Search the White Mansion, if you will—search Hamelen Castle—penetrate into the vaults—examine every nook, and crevice, and corner—and you will depart baffled and disappointed. But if you do adopt this course,' she added solemnly, 'then everything is at an end between you and me in respect to the proposal I have made, and the terms I have demanded.'

'Lady,' said John Zitzka, after a pause of more than a minute, during which he reflected deeply upon the topic of the conversation, 'I accept your proposal, and I agree to your terms.'

'You will give me the guarantee of your own hand-writing?' said the baroness; then, perceiving that the captain-General hesitated, she added in a low and deep-toned voice, 'Because it is like selling my very soul to Satan, and I must be sure of receiving the full price of my black iniquity.'

'True,' murmured the Captain-General, struck by the full force of the perfidious woman's remark; and again so deep was the sense of loathing with which she inspired him, and so completely was he now undeceived in respect to her true character, that he could not raise his look towards that countenance from which the mask had thus fallen.

But hastily taking a piece of paper, he wrote thereon the four conditions which the baroness had specified, and which she now dictated anew, and appending his signature to the document, he placed it in her hand.

'Within eight days from the present time,' said the baroness, concealing the paper in her bosom, 'shall the princess be in your power, and her treasures at your disposal. But in the meantime, the compact we have formed—nay, the very circumstance of my visit to this castle—must be retained profoundly secret.'

'Fear not that I shall betray your ladyship,' observed John Zitzka, rising from his seat to imply that their interview need not be prolonged.

'Farewell, mighty chieftain,' said the baroness, drawing her veil carefully in several folds over her countenance.

She then took her departure, and the Captain-General of the Taborites was once more alone to deliberate upon the affairs of Bohemia.

Until a late hour in the night did he remain thus occupied; and twelve had been announced some time by the water-clock in his apartment, when he thought of seeking his couch. But just as he was about to retire to his chamber, a messenger, much travel-soiled, and who had just arrived at the castle, was conducted into his presence.

This midnight arrival was that of a courier bearing a letter from the magistrate who had investigated the affair of

Ermach's murder and Gloria's escape, a hasty narrative of which the venerable functionary had lost no time in despatching to the Captain-General of the Taborites. The same document contained an account of the arrest of a youth whose name and rank alike remained unknown, but who wore the armor described as having been self-appropriated by the liberator of the State Prisoners; and the magistrate failed not to specify, for his own justification, the reason which had induced him to release his prisoner from custody—namely, the influence possessed by the wearer of Zitzka's signet ring!

But comparatively light and trivial was the regard which Zitzka paid to this latter portion of the magistrate's communication; so tremendously absorbing was the fearful interest of all that concerned the Daughter of Glory.

For upwards of an hour did the Captain-General pace his room in a state of excitement such as he had never been known to experience before—and the wonted iron sternness of his features was relaxed and distorted with the workings of an unspeakable anguish.

At last,—between two and three o'clock in the morning, he appeared to have arrived at some sudden resolution—and ordering the Captain of the guard to be summoned to his presence, he addressed this officer in the following manner:

'Take horse without delay—you and half a dozen of your men, and ride as if for life and death, in pursuit of the Austrian knight, Sir Ernest de Colmar, who is journeying along the great southern road towards his own country. In his company you will find Satanais; and, without hesitation or remorse—without pity or fear,—despite, too, of her menaces or her entreaties,—you will tear her away from him—you will make her your prisoner—and you will bring her back with all possible expedition to Prague. Depart,—away with you,—there is not a moment to lose!'

The Taborite captain bowed and was about to retire, when Zitzka, struck by a sudden thought, called him back.

'Stay!' cried the one-eyed chieftain, who was still laboring under a strong excitement, 'I have something more to say. It may happen that Sir Ernest de Colmar will protect Satanais against you, that he may disbelieve your authority and question the truth of your mission, for he is brave as a lion and would defend to the very death any one whom he loves or esteems. In such a case—but only in such a case,—you will give him this note.'

And Zitzka, seating himself at the table, penned a hasty line upon a piece of paper, which he folded, secured with wax and silken string, and handed to the Taborite captain.

This officer then withdrew; and the one-eyed chieftain retired to his own chamber.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED AGAIN.

We left Sir Ernest de Colmar and the beautiful Satanais at the moment when Angela Wildon sped away from the roadside hostel with the rapidity of an arrow shot from a bow,—the gallant charger which the knight had given her, having suddenly appeared to borrow the wings of the wind.

'Yes, away she flew upon the fleet courser, with the quickness of a thought flashing through the brain; away—away—without having revealed her sex and name—and likewise without giving any explanation of the motives of her sudden departure.

To the reader who knows who she is, and who is also aware that she is in love with Sir Ernest de Colmar, her precipitate flight must be intelligible enough; for in Satanais she beheld a rival, and her woman's pride as well as her virgin modesty suddenly revolted at the idea of her revealing her sex in the presence of that superb beauty. But to Sir Ernest de Colmar, who knew not that his gallant deliverer was of the gentle sex, much less that she was Angela Wildon the forest-maiden,—that abrupt flight, without the promised revelation of name and rank and without even the friendly ceremony of a farewell, instantaneously became a mingled source of astonishment and vexation.

'Wherefore has your friend thus hastily quitted us?' inquired Satanais, advancing from the door-way to the spot where De Colmar had halted, and where he stood gazing in the direction in which Angela had disappeared from his view.

'I know not—I am bewildered!' exclaimed the knight. 'Everything connected with that youth is full of mystery, and I begin to fear——'

'To fear what, my well-beloved Ernest?' said Satanais, perceiving that he hesitated; and, as she spoke, she laid her hand lightly upon his shoulder. 'What apprehension is it that you entertain concerning that armed warrior?'

'I fear that he is either a prey to some secret grief, or that his intellect wanders at times,' answered De Colmar, taking the hand of Satanais and leading her slowly back into the hostel. 'Perhaps he cherishes a hopeless love for I remember that he confessed to me, the evening before last, that he was enamored of a certain Angela Wildon, who, by the bye, is well known to your unhappy sister, Gloria.'

'Poor youth!' murmured Satanais, with a sigh.

'Ah! you possess a heart which is alike generous and tender, my well-beloved,' whispered Sir Ernest de Colmar; 'and you can pity the woes of a fellow-creature. Deeply am I indebted to the gallant youth who has just quitted us in a manner as abrupt as it is unaccountable; and I would that an opportunity might serve of testifying my gratitude for the services he rendered me in a very pressing emergency. But the time may come when I shall meet him again, and when he will reveal to me his name and his motives for having concealed it from me.'

Thus discoursing, the knight and the dark houri entered the hostel together; and having partaken of the repast which was prepared for them, they rose from the table to proceed on their journey. Satanais possessed a jet black palfrey; and when mounted upon the graceful animal, which curvetted and pranced as if with a feeling of pride on account of the lovely burthen which it bore, the superb beauty of the Daughter of Satan was set off to its greatest advantage.

Nothing could excel, and scarcely equal, the symmetry of her shape and the elegance of her carriage, as her form, so flexible and elastic, yielded with a sort of wavy, undulating motion, like that of a swan's neck, to every movement of her steed. Her arms, naked almost to the shoulder, and appearing in the olive richness of the skin as if they were delicately bronzed, were gracefully rounded—one, as the hand held the reins—the other, as it hung negligently by her side. And that same bright bronze tint of the complexion showed amidst the ribands which were wound cross-wise up the legs; yes, and it was this same rich olive hue which the well-rounded bosom, the admirably-shaped shoulders, and the splendid throat displayed, and which deepened into a fine carnation upon the cheeks, but softened almost into purity of paleness upon the broad and noble forehead. In a word, impossible were it by any power of language to do justice to the richness of that dark complexion which tinted a skin of velvet softness, but covering flesh of the healthiest firmness; and impossible also were it to find terms glowing and fervid enough to depict all the splendor of that form whose proportions and contours were so advantageously and voluptuously profiled by the equestrian attitude of the Daughter of Satan.

Sir Ernest de Colmar was ravished by her appearance. Every time he beheld her, it seemed that he discovered new personal graces and fresh charms; and so complete was the fascinating influence which this romantic being had shed around her lover—so deep was the mystic spell which held his heart in ecstatic thraldom—and so ineffably melting and tender were the emotions which her mere presence, apart from her looks and her words, had excited in his soul, that he felt he could cheerfully resign all the pride and power of his position amongst the denizens of earth, and retire to the seclusion of some place afar from the busy haunts of men, there to languish out the remainder of his existence in the arms of Satanais!

And then again, as he contemplated the dark houri who rode by his side, he thought within himself how proudly his heart would beat when the time should come for him to present that woman of matchless beauty to his friends—present her as his bride—the wife of his bosom—the partner of his rank, his fortune, his power, and his glory! Yes—and with what feelings of pleasure should he spread before her the richest gems and the costliest garments, and bid her deck her form in a manner that should develop and irradiate those beauties which no art could, however, enhance! Moreover, how ecstatic would be his feelings and how elevated his pride, when he could take by the hand that superb creature thus grandly arrayed, and conduct her amidst the glittering company assembled in halls brilliantly lighted—while she, with her eyes shedding a lustre far excelling that of the crystal lamps suspended around, and eclipsing even the jets of

light flashing from the diamonds placed above her own noble brow, would traverse the dazzled and admiring crowd with all the mingled dignity and grace that became *his* bride!

Such were Sir Ernest de Colmar's thoughts, as he rode by the side of Satanais.

This was the third morning of his journey—a journey which had already been characterised by so many remarkable incidents and varied adventures; and we must likewise remind the reader that the remainder of the cavalcade now consisted of only Linda and Beatrice and the knight's two grooms.

For a few hours the journey was continued without any occurrence worthy of mention; and at about mid-day the travellers reached the wood where De Colmar first became acquainted with Satanais in the Taborite encampment. The reader will scarcely require to be informed that the knight expressed his joy at once more beholding a spot which must ever be endeared to his memory; and for this, as well as for every other proof of ardent love which he demonstrated towards his beauteous companion, he received her sweetest smiles and her most melting looks.

The wood was passed—the journey was continued along the great southern road, and at about three in the afternoon the travellers reached a point whence another route branched off from the main one, in a slightly diverging direction.

'This road to the right,' said De Colmar, 'passes by Altendorf Castle, and this one to the left is longer and more circuitous, though eventually touching the Austrian frontier.'

'Let us pursue this one,' exclaimed Satanais, indicating the latter route with some degree of excitement, if not of impatience; then, as the steeds struck into the road which she had thus chosen, she said in her usually calm voice of golden melody, 'I have preferred this path, inasmuch as there stands a ruined castle upon yonder hill, where we may halt for a few minutes and inspect the picturesque remains of feudal grandeur.'

'Be it so,' said De Colmar; and in about half an hour the party reached the ruins to which Satanais had alluded.

Dismounting from their steeds, which they left in charge of the grooms, and bidding Linda and Beatrice remain likewise at the same place until their return, the knight and the dark houri entered the mazes of mouldering walls, crumbling towers, and ruined battlements.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE RUINED CASTLE.

Upon an eminence commanding an extensive view of the circumjacent country, stood the dilapidated fortalice amidst the ruins of which Sir Ernest de Colmar and Satanais entered.

The exterior wall, which had given way in many places, formed a circuit of at least three quarters of a mile; and the space within was occupied by the remains of the buildings which had once crowded the enclosure. Indeed, the extent of the ruins sufficiently indicated not only the vastness but likewise the strength and importance of that stronghold ere the whirlwind of desolation had swept through its lordly halls.

But it was not to the hand of Age that the ancient castle had succumbed. No, for notwithstanding four centuries had passed over it since its foundation-stone was laid, it still appeared to belong not to Time, but to Eternity. The mournful tale of its ruin was, however, read in the walls blackened by fire; in the pieces of broken battering rams peeping out from beneath the piles of masonry which in their fall had crushed the very instruments of their destruction; and in the rust-covered cannon balls that might here and there be picked up amidst the long dank grass that waved in the deserted court-yards.

Yes—every feature of the place bespoke the horrors of siege, and sack, and conflagration; and a closer scrutiny would lead to the discovery of relics of armor, broken weapons, and even human bones, amongst the fragments of stone-work scattered about in all directions.

It was a mournful sight to behold how completely the rage of war had done its work, and how successfully the fury of man had destroyed a place which Time would have spared for many centuries.

The four walls of the old Keep, or Donjon, frowned in blackest gloom upon the less lofty buildings that were grouped around; and the dismantled tower at each corner of that huge quadrangular edifice seemed like a grim sentinel placed there by the very genius of desolation itself to maintain

the forlorn aspect of the scene. And as the fire had melted all the glass from the windows and there were numerous breaches and fissures in the walls, the eye could look every portion of the ruined structure through and through. Thus was it easy to trace the position of the grand halls and the spacious saloons which had at once echoed to the sounds of festivity and rejoicing,—easy also to follow the track of the long passages and galleries which separated the suites of apartments and led from one division of the building to another; and the more minutely these details were examined by the visitor to this assemblage of ruins, the deeper became his sense of the grandeur, strength, and importance which must have characterised so vast a feudal tenement in the days of its glory.

Hand in hand did Sir Ernest de Colmar and Satanais pass on amidst the ruins, the knight carefully selecting for his beauteous companion a pathway that was least encumbered by the scattered fragments or menaced by the overhanging masonry.

But strange was the mood of Satanais! A kind of reverential awe had seized upon her the very instant that she first set foot within the circuit of those mouldering walls; and she walked with a solemn air and a slow pace amidst the maze of ruins which the hand of desolation had made. Once or twice she hesitated, paused, and even stopped short, as if repenting the sudden caprice or endeavoring to struggle against the powerful impulse (which ever it might be) that had led her to propose in the first instance a visit to this dilapidated castle. Then De Colmar, with the tenderest solicitude, would inquire if she were attacked by indisposition; and Satanais, either ashamed or afraid to acknowledge her superstitious desire that they should retrace their steps and quit the scene, subdued her feelings with a great effort and responded with re-assurances as cheering as she could possibly render them. But although she would then essay to continue the discourse in a gay tone and to assume an air perfectly unrestrained and free from embarrassment, yet in reality her mind remained disturbed, her cheerfulness was forced, her spirits were unnaturally buoyant, and a heavy load lay upon her heart.

The full extent of this singular and moody condition of her soul, Sir Ernest de Colmar did not however perceive. For when she assured him, in fervid language and with glowing looks, that she was neither indisposed nor unhappy, he was only too eager, in his enthusiastic fondness, to believe that she was as free from bodily or mental ailment as she represented; and to his eye at least her lustrous regards and her enchanting smiles absorbed every appearance of gloom or pre-occupation. Thus when the surface of a river glows with the effulgence of the sun, the eye of man, dazzled and bewildered, vainly seeks to plunge into the depths of the stream, pellucid and fathomable to the view though the waters may really be.

Having entered the ruins by a breach in the outer wall, De Colmar and Satanais crossed a small court-yard, and then passed into the nearest building. A deep archway, in which a fragment of the once massive door still clung to a rusty hinge, admitted them into a circular vestibule, the roof of which had been of oak elaborately groined; and from this place the blackened remnants of tall folding-doors led into a vast hall, the windows of which were divided into several lights by mullions, or slender perpendicular columns, branching out at the top into sculptured tracery of various forms. Fragments of furniture were rotting upon the stone pavement, where the grass grew; and in some places the floor was piled with the portions of the roof that had fallen in.

Beyond this hall, which had evidently served as the grand banquetting-room, there was a gallery from each side of which a staircase ascended. One of the flights had completely fallen in; and upon looking upwards, the eye could penetrate into the skeletons of several chambers which conflagration and ruin had thus laid mournfully bare. Stripped of the splendid decorations and despoiled of the costly furniture which once belonged to them, presenting to the view little more than blackened walls, empty windows, burnt rafters, and half-charred beams,—those chambers told the tale of war in all its ghastly horror!

The other staircase to which we have alluded was still standing, though broken in many places and almost choked up with the fragments of fallen masonry. Nevertheless De Colmar led Satanais up this flight, and they entered a long gallery, with a partition wall on one side, but numerous door-ways communicating with apartments on the other. At the the top of the staircase

several pieces of armor and three or four remnants of swords and bucklers were lying scattered about; and De Colmar observed to Satanais that this spot had doubtless proved the scene of a desperate stand on the part of the besieged and a fierce onslaught on that of the invaders. The dark houri murmured a reply which did not exactly reach De Colmar's ears; and as he fancied that the bare idea of the bloody conflict to which he had alluded, was perhaps calculated to excite painful emotions in her bosom, he led her more hastily along as they entered the gallery.

From that passage opened many dismantled chambers, which had once been the abode of luxury and comfort. The long narrow windows were still perfect enough to afford an idea of the architectural elegance which had distinguished them ere the date of their ruin; for, although the glass was all gone, and the frame-work hung like blackened rags in its setting, yet the sculptured arches adorned with lozenges and trefoils, failed not to attract the notice of the visitor to that scene of desolation.

Threading this long gallery, De Colmar and his beauteous companion passed into a spacious landing place, whence branched off two passages, in addition to that by which they had entered it.—On the floor the remains of several statues were scattered; and over them waved the dank grass which was growing in the interstices of the blackened beams of the flooring. There were no side windows here; but a large circular opening in the roof showed where a sky-light had formerly been.

Entering one of the galleries, the knight and the Daughter of Satan pushed their way amidst the increasing impediments which arose from the greater dilapidation of those portions of the edifice that they were now visiting; and in a few minutes they reached a small vestibule, over the entrance to which a stone crucifix was suspended.

Traversing the vestibule, their progress was momentarily barred by a huge door which had not been burnt out of its frame, although its surface presented the blackened and charred appearance, showing that the lambent flames had played upon it for some time. Pushing open this door, the knight led Satanais onward; and it was now with a species of resigned docility that she accompanied him whithersoever he might choose to conduct her.

Although it was the month of August and the afternoon was warm even to sultriness, yet did a chill strike not only to the heart of Satanais, but likewise to that of Sir Ernest de Colmar, as they found themselves in the chapel of the ruined castle. For a cold and solemn stillness seemed to dwell in that place; and a reverential awe fastened on their souls as they thus suddenly entered the sacred temple which the fire appeared to have spared more than any other part of the mighty stronghold. For an instant this circumstance struck our hero with the superstitious effect of a miracle; but a second glance thrown around the chapel convinced him that it was the solidity of the masonry and the absence of much wood work in the walls and windows that had kept out the fiery tongues of the conflagration from the interior.

But here had time and neglect already accomplished much of that devastation which the flames had left undone. The mildew and damp had coated the fluted pillars with a loathsome green; and the pavement was slippery with the moisture that dripped through the roof and became fetid with stagnation. The pulpit had fallen away from the wall against which it once stood; and the sculptured figures that had supported it, were blackened with cobwebs. At the altar the ravages of neglect were equally apparent. The crucifix had given way, the lamps had fallen from the chains to which they were originally suspended, and the table had sunk in with the weight of the ornaments left upon it, and which even the hand of the ravager had spared. The canvass of two large pictures overlooking this ruined altar, was hanging in black tatters in the frames which were so covered with dust that their rich carved work was completely hidden; and several banners, the trophies of military exploits in the olden time, were now changed to rotting rags.

In a reverential silence did Sir Ernest de Colmar survey all the objects and features of the chapel; while Satanais pressed close to his side with a feeling of deeper awe. At length it struck him that the desolation of the scene was producing a painful effect upoh her mind; and he hastily led her away by means of a narrow flight of steps leading from a doorway in the immediate vicinage of the altar.

Having reached the bottom of this somewhat precipitate descent, the

knight and his beauteous companion found themselves in the court-yard belonging to the Donjon; and our hero proposed that they should mount to the summit of the towering edifice and thence view the circumjacent scenery. To this Satanais yielded an assent; and they accordingly began to climb a spiral staircase of stone which wound round the inside of one of the four towers of the quadrangle.

From time to time they paused to look forth from the long narrow loop-holes, upon that part of the ruins which their eyes could thus command; and at length they gained the top, emerging from a low door upon the flat roof of the Donjon. This roof was destroyed in many places; but all round the edges, where it joined the battlemented parapet, it was preserved,—thus forming a species of gallery projecting from the walls, but having a vast chasm in the midst. And down that opening which the conflagration had made, could the eyes plunge to the very foundations of the Donjon; and the brain became dizzy with the contemplation of that yawning depth.

It was, therefore, over the parapet that De Colmar and Satanais bent their looks; and all around them lay the ruined buildings of the castle, while beyond the exterior wall and the dry moat, the open country stretched in all the variety of declivity and plain, valley and grove, mead and hill. In the close vicinage of the dilapidated stronghold, meandered the river Moldau; and down to the very bank of the stream extended the enclosure which had once been the beautifully-cultivated garden of the castle.

As Sir Ernest de Colmar, with Satanais by his side, was slowly carrying his looks around the adjacent country, he caught a glimpse of a dark and shapeless object on the summit of a far-off hill, and which did not appear to form the natural head of the eminence itself. Thereon he accordingly fixed his eyes with a keener scrutiny; and by degrees he could distinguish a regular form of building; the mass, hitherto confused now gradually assuming the shape of walls, towers, and battlements.

'Behold, Satanais,' he said, extending his arm in that direction, 'there is another castle upon yon height.'

'I have already observed it,' she responded, in a tone which was slightly tremulous as if with some profound feeling that she sought to subdue, or at least to hide.

'And, behold once more!' exclaimed De Colmar, whose eyes had travelled a little farther round the horizon in the same direction, 'there is another castle upon the summit of an eminence nearly as elevated as the former.'

'Yes—I had already observed that second castle likewise,' said the Daughter of Satan, with difficulty subduing the profound sigh that swelled almost into a sob in her bosom.

'Three castles, all in the same neighborhood and within a few miles of each other,' mused De Colmar to himself, but in an audible tone; and so much was he interested in the contemplation of those castellated objects which broke the undulations of the hills in the horizon, that he did not observe the emotions which were thus agitating his beauteous companion. 'Three castles!' he repeated, 'and all in such unusual vicinage. But it is to be hoped that the other two are not in the same lorn and dilapidated condition as this one.'

'Yes, those two castles which you behold from hence, are likewise in ruins,' said Satanais, who had caught the words which fell musingly from her lover's lips.

'Three castles so close to each other, and all in ruins!' he exclaimed, struck by the singularity of the circumstance. 'But what terrible fatality could have worked such wholesale desolation?—Are you, my beloved Satanais, acquainted with the history of these three castles? for a strange and mysterious presentiment tells me that some legend of no ordinary interest must be associated with this trio of ruined fortalices.'

'Oh! let us depart hence, Ernest—let us depart!' cried Satanais, suddenly clinging to him as if a mortal terror had stricken her, while her magnificent eyes glared wildly from the countenance that was upturned with an expression of passionate entreaty towards his own.

'Good heaven! what ails you, my beloved?' he demanded, catching her in his arms and straining her to his breast. 'Has some sudden indisposition seized upon you? or some panic terror——'

'Yes, yes—'tis a panic, an irresistible panic,' exclaimed Satanais, in a broken voice and with increasing wildness of looks. 'I was foolish—mad, to come hither; and yet I foresaw not that the tide of recollections would be so full, so strong, so overwhelming.'

'Ah! then you have painful reminis-

cenes associated with this desolate scene?' said the knight, in the most soothing tone of love's tenderness.—'But you are better now, my own Satanais? and will you rest yourself for a few minutes here to recover your composure, ere I re-conduct you to the spot where we left your handmaidens?'

'Yes, I will repose here for a moment,' replied Satanais, seating herself upon a huge fragment of the battlement that had given way; then, bowing her head upon her hands, and resting her elbows upon her knees, she appeared to be either abandoning herself to a torrent of gushing thoughts, or else to be straining every nerve to conquer her emotions and recover her self-possession.

De Colmar would fain have questioned her respecting the cause of her agitation, and also to learn how any portion of her wild and romantic oriental history could possibly be connected with a ruined castle in Bohemia, but he feared to aggravate her distress by fixing her thoughts upon a topic that was evidently of a very painful character. No, rather than force her ideas to dwell on any afflicting subject, he would do all and anything he could to wean them therefrom; and he was about to address her in terms of tender solace, when the sounds of footsteps and the rustling of garments near, caused him to turn his head and Satanais to raise her eyes suddenly at the same moment.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE THREE RUINED CASTLES.

An old man, somewhat bent with age, and over whose breast flowed a long silvery beard, was slowly approaching the spot where Satanais was still seated upon the stone, and the Austrian warrior was standing by her side. There was something patriarchal in the appearance of that old man, something well calculated to inspire the profoundest veneration and respect. For his years could not have been less than eighty; and although he leant upon a staff, and his form was slightly bowed, still there was a certain firmness and a measured assurance in his step which denoted a hale and vigorous old age. He was dressed in grey garments made of plain material, and his long silver hair flowed from beneath a velvet cap. His countenance, though stamped with melancholy, wore an expression of benevolence; and his mild blue eyes and placid lips indicated a soul at peace with God and man, and which was awaiting resignedly and without alarm for the supreme moment when it should be summoned from the sphere of the latter into the presence of the former.

From the venerable person of this old man, the eyes of De Colmar and Satanais were simultaneously cast around in order to ascertain whence he could have come; for they were close by the tower containing the spiral staircase, and they knew that he had not emerged from that direction. But they now remarked a door standing open in the tower, at the angle diagonally opposite; and that open door revealed the interior of a small room fitted up with but a little better appearance of comfort than a hermit's cell.

'Venerable man,' exclaimed De Colmar, accosting the patriarchal personage, 'is it possible that you reside in that place?'

'I have dwelt there for years, and shall die there,' was the calm response. 'But did I not overhear you address that lady as if she were indisposed?—Should such be the case, my cell contains pure water from the spring, refreshments, too, of a frugal nature, but to all of which you are most welcome. Hie thou thither, Sir Knight,' added the old man, catching a glimpse of the golden spurs upon De Colmar's heels; 'thy legs are more agile than mine—and fetch thence all that thy suffering companion may need. Or if she would prefer repose and rest, she may be assured of the enjoyment of tranquillity in that humble abode.'

Sir Ernest de Colmar thanked the old man for his kindness, and turned towards Satanais to ascertain her wishes in respect to the various little attentions which the venerable octogenarian had suggested.

But the whole appearance of the Daughter of Satan struck the knight with such a profound surprise that the words he was about to utter died upon his lips. She was still seated upon the stone, but her body was bent forward, her neck was distended, and she was gazing upon the old man with a mingled intentness and alarm, as if endeavoring to trace in his countenance either the actual lineaments or the likeness which she seemed to remember, and dreading at the same time that his presence was

an augury of evil. In fine, her features so darkly splendid now evinced a painful mingling of anguish and curiosity; and it was evident that all her thoughts and feelings were absorbed in the circumstance of this old man's sudden and most unexpected appearance.

'Satanais, dear Satanais,' said De Colmar, at length recovering the power of speech, and addressing her in the kindest tone,—'this good old man offers you refreshment, or the use of his cell, if you stand in need of repose.'

That singular sentiment of mingled suspense, curiosity, and terror, which had for nearly a minute held the Daughter of Satan motionless and spell-bound, now seemed to break all of a sudden; and, starting to her feet, she said in a hurried manner, 'Ernest, dear Ernest, let us depart, I beseech you!'

'But you are unwell, Satanais—you are profoundly agitated by emotions which you would conceal from me!' exclaimed De Colmar, taking her hand and pressing it tenderly between both his own. 'Indeed, I ought to remember that you ere now spoke of certain reminiscences connected with this scene of desolation——'

'Ah! who possesses recollections of Ildegardo Castle in the time of its glory, its might, and its pomp?' said the old man, his voice expressing a mingled solemnity and excitement, and his feet quickening their pace as he advanced close up to the spot where Satanais was now leaning, or rather clinging to the knight's arm. 'Not you, young lady,' continued the octogenarian, fixing his blue eyes searchingly upon the Daughter of Satan, who appeared to quail and contract, as it were, within herself, beneath that look so earnest aad yet so full of a melancholy benevolence of feeling. 'No, not you!' he repeated.—'And yet it may be—yes, for your years must have numbered eighteen or nineteen, and therefore it is probable that in your childhood you may have had a knowledge of things, or an acquaintanceship with persons connected with this castle.'

'Who are you, old man?' suddenly inquired Satanais, putting the question with a cold shudder, as if she already anticipated the answer.

'My name is Bernard, and I was for many years in the service of Ildegardo,' was the melancholy response; and a train of unutterable thoughts swept over the countenance of the aged man, as if all the scenes, and incidents, and personages of happier times were suddenly conjured up to his memory by the question which had been put and the answer he had given.

'Bernard—for many years in the service of Baron Ildegardo,' repeated Satanais, in a low and musing tone, so that she was not overheard by the old man, although De Colmar's ear lost not the reiteration of those words which that octogenarian had himself first spoken.

'Satanais, in the name of heaven, what ails you?' demanded the knight, in a whispering voice full of anxiety. 'From the first moment that we set foot within these walls, everything has disturbed you—your entire manner has changed—your eyes look strange things—you are nervous and pre-occupied at the same time——'

'Do not question me now, my well-beloved,' murmured the dark houri imploringly; 'I shall be calmer and feel better in a few moments.'

And she re-seated herself, or rather sank down upon the stone, as if overwhelmed by the weight of ineffable recollections.

Sir Ernest de Colmar, fancying that she wished to be alone, as it were, with her own thoughts, in order to be enabled to tranquillize them and thereby regaining her composure, turned aside and once more accosted the old man, who was now gazing in a deep abstraction upon the far-off castles in the horizon.

'Venerable Bernard,' said the knight, 'you appear to be contemplating certain objects which have already excited a strange and mysterious interest in my soul.'

'To what does your excellency allude?' inquired the old man, not exactly understanding the remark, because he did not at the moment perceive in which direction De Colmar's eyes were turned.

'I was speaking of those ruins which I observe in the south-east, and likewise of those which are visible on yon eminence in the east,' said our hero. 'To whom did those castles belong? and how came they as dilapidated and desolate as the one on whose tower we now stand?'

'Ah! then your excellency is a stranger in these parts, that the legend attached to the three fortalices should be unknown to you?' said the venerable Bernard. 'At all events, you must have been aware—and if not, I believe

I have already informed you—that these ruins which lie beneath and around our feet, are those of Ildegardo Castle. On yonder eminence in the south-east stands the wreck of Manfredo Castle; and on the height which you behold due-east, are the blackened remains of the stronghold of Baron Georgey. Three more powerful nobles existed not in Bohemia; and three more magnificent dwellings, combining strength and grandeur, could not be found in Europe's list of feudal fortalices. My master, the Baron Ildegardo, who was surnamed "*The Thunder*," was a mighty warrior and a great hunter——But you behold, Sir Knight,' exclaimed the venerable man, suddenly interrupting himself, and pointing to a particular place on the bank of the Moldau which flowed past the ruins of Ildegardo Castle—'you behold, I say, that spot where the trunk of a tree, blasted by the lightning, hangs over the stream?'

'Yes, I mark it well,' said De Colmar, astonished at the painful excitement which the aged Bernard's tone and manner had suddenly displayed, as he pointed towards that special spot. 'But what dreadful reminiscence is associated therewith?'

'Alas! alas!' exclaimed the old man, shaking his head ominously, 'It was there, beneath that tree, deep in the waters of the Moldau, that the remains of the murdered priest He——'

'Silence, driveller! silence!' suddenly ejaculated, or rather shrieked Satanais, in a tone so full of rending terror and thrilling anguish that it transfixed both the old man and Sir Ernest de Colmar with mingled amazement and horror; then, bounding at the same time from her seat upon the stone, the incomprehensible being grasped her lover violently by the arm; and looking up into his face with a countenance expressing emotions frightfully harrowed, she said in a low, hoarse, thick voice, 'If you have any regard for me, Ernest, you will lead me away at once!'

'Farewell, then, old man, farewell!' exclaimed De Colmar, throwing a kind look on Bernard, whom he would fain have tarried to question farther. 'And now, my beloved, I am at your orders,' he added, giving his hand to Satanais, who had just subdued her emotions by a great effort, and whose looks, no longer wild nor haggard, suddenly beamed upon him their gratitude in a flood of lustre.

'At all events your excellency will permit me to treat you with fitting respect, and conduct you forth from the ruins,' said Bernard, whose politeness was, however, only an excuse to enable him to see a little more of Satanais, her extraordinary conduct having made a deep impression upon him.

'Then, before De Colmar had time to utter a word, or the Daughter of Satan to breathe a remonstrance, the active old man, brushing past them, began to precede them down the spiral staircase.

'Come, Ernest, let us delay not,' whispered Satanais, maintaining her composure; 'we will rid ourselves of this importunate old man when we reach the bottom of the steps.'

And down the staircase they accordingly went, old Bernard preceding them with his staff.

In a few minutes they emerged from the door-way at the foot of the tower; and Bernard exclaimed, 'Permit me, brave knight—and you, lovely lady, to conduct you amidst these ruins and point out to you the most striking features of the place.'

'Ernest, dear Ernest,' whispered Satanais, throwing upon her companion a look full of the tenderest entreaty, and pressing at the same time his hand in which her own was clasped, 'we have seen enough of this desolate place; I implore you to dismiss that old man at once and conduct me away from the scene.'

But scarcely were these words uttered, when a number of armed men, led by a monk, rushed forth from amidst the ruins. In a moment the venerable Bernard was dashed rudely aside by that ecclesiastic who thus appeared at the head of the party; while a rending shriek burst from the lips of Satanais, as her eyes encountered the malignant features of Father Cyprian!

'Perish—and be my vengeance gratified!' exclaimed the priest, raising his left arm—for his right, be it remembered, was disabled; and the dagger which he grasped ferociously flashed in the sun-light.

'No—'tis thou who shalt die, monster!' cried Satanais, instantaneously recovering the desperate bravery of a heroine; and, drawing her poinard, she sprang towards the Carthusian with the fury of a tigress.

But the priest stepped glancingly aside, at the same instant directing his weapon at the bosom of Satanais. Light as a fawn did she start back as

her quick eye caught the manœuvre and comprehended the murderous intention of the priest; but his dagger in its descent inflicted a wound upon her arm, and the blood spirted forth upon her garments.

All this had occurred, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, and before De Colmar had even time to draw his good sword from its sheath; but now his blade swept hissingly through the air; and, as the Carthusian's armed followers rushed on at the came moment, the the battle was on the point of commencing in real earnest, but on very unequal terms, when Angela Wildon, clad in her brilliant armor, burst round the angle of the building and plunged into the midst of the melèe.

CHAPTER LXX.

ILDEGARDO CASTLE.

A MOMENTARY pause followed the sudden appearance of the forest-maiden in her steel panoply and with her vizor closed; and the octogenarian Bernard, receiving the fainting Satanais in his arms, was bearing her aside, when Father Cyprian exclaimed to his armed followers, 'Seize her, my brave men! seize her! By your oaths, I adjure you to seize her!'

And, as if some ferocious demon were urging him on, the priest rushed towards Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela Wildon, who side by side were covering the retreat of Satanais.

'Once more we fight in each other's company, O gallant unknown!' exclaimed the Austrian knight; then as his eagle glance rapidly numbered the enemy, he added, 'Seven to two are the odds, brave youth; but we have cut our way through as many on a former occasion!'

'And we will not prove ourselves recreants now!' cried Angela Wildon, as her bright weapon, sweeping through the air, dashed Father Cyprian's dagger from his hand.

The weapon, stained with the blood of Satanais, flew like a rocket to a considerable distance; and the priest, springing aside from the midst of the conflict, left his armed servitors to close with the Austrian knight and the forest-maiden.

And for a minute the position of these two was perilous in the extreme, for the bravos of the Bronze Statue hemmed them in, formed a circle about them, and assailed them with a desperate fury. Back to back, did De Colmar and Angela Wildon oppose themselves to this terrific onslaught; and while the wondrous skill of the former served him as well as a buckler, the proof armor of the latter turned aside the points and the edges of the weapons which rained their blows upon the shining panoply.

Yes,—for a minute the conflict was tremendous! a minute, so short a space in the ordinary occurrences of life and of which so many pass without our knowing how,—but now constituting a period in which much was done and lives were lost!

For behold! the brand of the Austrian knight has stricken two of the armed servitors dead at his feet, and that of Angela Wildon has disabled another. Still there are three left, and these fight with the rage of desperation and the fury of demons! And what renders the position of affairs the more extremely critical, is the fact that the quick eye of Sir Ernest de Colmar observes Father Cyprian hastening in the direction of the entrance to the spiral staircase leading to the summit of the Donjon; and it is thither that the venerable Bernard has already borne the wounded and insensible Satanais! The Carthusian, then, is evidently in pursuit of the Daughter of Satan; and in a few moments he will overtake her.—But if De Colmar rushes after him, he will be leaving the brave unknown to a certain massacre at the hands of the three desperados who are assailing them!

All these reflections passed like lightning through the brain of our hero; and he saw that in a few instants much must be gained, or much lost! The life of Satanais was doubtless at stake—it hung upon a thread—for if the Carthusian succeeded in reaching her *first*, he would doubtless immolate her to his savage and unaccountable rage.

Never was need so great—never was emergency so pressing! But even while the very existence of this tremendous contingency and grave uncertainty was flashing across the mental vision of the Austrian warrior, the whole affair was brought to a decisive issue. For Angela's gleaming blade struck down another of the armed bravos; and at the same moment De Colmar stretched at his feet the third

whose life-blood his sword had drunk within the space of a minute and a half!

The remaining servitor turned and fled precipitately, and, swift as an arrow, did the Austrian knight dash towards the entrance at the foot of the tower containing the spiral staircase. The priest had already gained the threshold; but there he paused for an instant and turned to glance at the spot where he had left his followers combatting in a circle round De Colmar and the forest-maiden.

No words can, however, depict the horror and amazement of the Carthusian when he perceived the altered appearance of the scene! In a comparatively few seconds had that change been effected, as if by magic! On the ground lay five of his servitors, and the sixth was at that moment flying precipitately round an angle of the adjacent ruins. Angela Wildon was stooping down to ascertain whether any of the foemen yet survived, and De Colmar was rushing towards the place where the Carthusian had paused, and whence he now beheld at a glance the miraculous change which the aspect of affairs had assumed!

At the same instant, from another part of the ruins, the knight's two grooms were hastening to the spot from which had emanated the clash of weapons, and the loud voices that had reached their ears outside the wall of the castle; and those men were followed by Linda and Beatrice, who, alarmed by the same menacing sounds, were hurrying with terrified countenances to the scene where so much had taken place in so short a time.

Such was the prospect which met the Carthusian's view as he swept his rapid glance around; and perceiving that his only chance of safety was in flight, he darted away with incredible speed, turned the angle of the Donjon, plunged into the maze of ruins near, and was instantaneously lost to the view.

For a moment Sir Ernest de Colmar thought of following him; but remembering that Satanais was wounded, and that he had seen her borne senseless away from the scene of conflict, he abandoned his pursuit of the priest, and rushed up the spiral staircase.

In the meantime Angela Wildon was sorely afflicted to find that four of the men stretched upon the ground were already dead, and that the fifth was just breathing his last. She loosened the gorget from his neck and removed his helmet, but he merely fixed upon her his glazing eyes with an air of vacancy, and could not give utterance to a word. Almost immediately his jaw fell, his breast heaved with a painful respiration, and the vital spark fled for ever!

The forest-maiden turned away rather in mournfulness than in horror from the ghastly spectacle; and she murmured to herself, 'Oh! that the crimes of men should lead to such effusion of blood and loss of life! And blood has been spilt by my hands, and lives have been taken by the weapon which I wield! But in every case has it been on the side of a noble chivalry against base and murderous bravos, or else in self-defence! My woman's nature recoils from the fumes of the sanguine tide thus poured forth; but when I think of the cause and the necessity, I feel as a heroine! O Ernest, Ernest! fortunate was it for thee that by accident I deviated from the right road, and that curiosity prompted me to visit these ruins! Another moment, and thou would'st have been immolated to the fury of that vile priest and his too faithful myrmidons.'

Thus mused Angela Wildon for a few moments as she turned away from the spot where the five corpses now encumbered the ground, and where the soil was dyed with the crimson flood in which their lives had ebbed away.

She now observed the two grooms and the handmaidens hastening towards her, the former with their swords drawn in their hands, and the latter with a terrible consternation depicted upon their features. But Angela speedily reassured them all relative to the issue of the combat and the safety of De Colmar, although the joy attendant upon these tidings was considerably damped by the intelligence that Satanais was wounded.

'Wounded!' was the cry that burst simultaneously from the lips of Linda and Beatrice, and at the same instant they exchanged looks in which horror and grief expressed even a deeper and more mysterious terror still.

'Tranquillise yourselves, maidens,' exclaimed Angela, adopting the consolatory tone and manner of her assumed masculine character; for the vizor was still closed over her face, and her voice was disguised as much as possible.—'The wound which your mistress has received was in the arm; and no serious consequences need be apprehended.

Insensibility followed, from loss of blood and perhaps the sudden fright; but a venerable-looking old man was present to take charge of her and bear her away from the scene of the conflict.'

'But where is our beloved mistress?' exclaimed Linda, casting round her looks with all the wildness of poignant suspense and excruciating terror.

'Whither have they borne her?' demanded Beatrice, also sweeping her eyes all about the place, until her shuddering looks recoiled from the ghastly features of the dead bodies which lay at a little distance.

'By the entrance into yon tower did the old man disappear with his inanimate burthen,' said Angela, pointing in the direction to which she alluded.

'Thanks, kind stranger,' exclaimed Linda; and away she sped towards the tower, followed by Beatrice.

'Ah! here are drops of blood upon the step!' cried the latter, the moment they reached the foot of the spiral staircase. 'Alas! alas! our poor mistress——'

'Oh! what perils now surround her!' cried Linda, clasping her hands together in the deepest agony of mind, and leaning against the wall for support.—'She is wounded, the blood is pouring forth, she is senseless——'

'And in the hands of a stranger,' added Beatrice, a strong shudder convulsing her frame. 'Oh! what will be the result on stanching the blood and wiping the gore away from the arm——'

'And Sir Ernest de Colmar went this way,' exclaimed Linda. 'I saw him enter this place the moment after the priest turned and fled from the threshold!'

'By this time, then, Sir Ernest is, perhaps, by her side,' murmured Beatrice, almost overcome by her increasing terrors, 'and the flowing of her blood will inevitably lead to the discovery of the tremendous truth!'

'Holy Virgin defend us!' cried Linda. 'But insensate girls that we are,' she exclaimed, with a sudden revival of her self possession, 'what precious moments we are wasting thus by giving free vent to alarms that may after all prove groundless, but which should at least prompt us to the speedy performance of our duty! Come, Beatrice, come, our place is by the side of our mistress——'

'And who knows but that we may reach her in time to anticipate the appalling peril that now threatens her?' cried the younger girl, receiving a sudden inspiration from the cheering words and manner of her sister.

And the two handmaidens sprang up the spiral staircase with the lightness and speed of fawns.

Return we now to the Daughter of Satan herself.

Upon sinking into the arms of the venerable Bernard, she felt as if that faintness which is often the forerunner of death, had suddenly seized upon her, a film came over her eyes, surrounding objects disappeared rapidly from her view, and her senses abandoned her. The old man, who suddenly seemed to have acquired the strength of his earlier years in order to meet the emergency of the occasion, bore his lovely burthen hastily away from the scene of conflict and began the ascent of the spiral staircase with as much celerity as his aged limbs could possibly command, and more than they at first appeared capable of exercising.

But in a few moments he was compelled to halt; and, seating himself on a step with the still inanimate lady in his arms, he proceeded to stanch the blood flowing from her wound. This kind attention he performed with a piece of fine linen which he took from around his own neck; but finding that the crimson tide still streamed copiously from the lacerated flesh, he bandaged the arm with the linen and resumed his task of bearing the Daughter of Satan up the winding staircase.

At the nearest loop-hole he paused again; and thence he glanced forth to observe what was taking place below. Shudderingly were the old man's looks thus flung through that aperture, for assuredly did he expect to behold nothing less than the complete immolation of Sir Ernest de Colmar and Angela Wildon. But how indescribable was his amazement and how boundless his relief, when he saw the murderous assailants falling beneath the mighty arm of the dauntless Austrian and the keen weapon of the spirited unknown in the polished armor! The spectacle inspired the old man with renewed ardor,—and, perceiving that the friends of Satanais were safe enough, he concentrated all his thoughts and anxieties in the task of ministering unto the dark houri herself.

Toiling again up the narrow, steep, and winding staircase, Bernard still held the unconscious lady in his arms; and as the length of her swoon filled him

with serious apprehensions, he quickened his pace to the utmost of his power. At length he reached the summit of the steps; and now the fresh breeze of evening fanned the cheeks of the inanimate Satanais, as the old man emerged with her in his arms upon the broken roof of the Donjon.

Almost at the same instant Bernard's ears caught the sound of footsteps rapidly ascending the stairs; and his first feeling was one of terror lest the individual thus hurriedly approaching should prove to be one of the priest's party of desperados. But scarcely had the alarm risen up in his mind when it was dissipated by the appearance of Sir Ernest de Colmar himself; and in another moment Satanais was taken from the arms of the venerable octogenarian and strained, with mingled rapture and apprehension, to the breast of the Austrian warrior.

'Thanks, kind old man, for your generous attention!' he exclaimed, 'I shall not forget to reward you suitably. The wound is bandaged,—the blood is stanched, I perceive; but this prolonged insensibility——Oh! if it should lead to death——'

And De Colmar was seized with a mortal terror and an excruciating anguish at the bare thought.

'Let the breeze play upon her countenance,' said the old man, 'and I will fetch water from my cell.'

'Oh! delay not, I implore you!' cried the Austrian; and, while Bernard hurried away to his chamber in the opposite corner of the quadrangle, our hero, bending upon one knee, sustained the Daughter of Satan in his arms.

Her eyes were closed, her lips were slightly apart, the pearly teeth shining between, and not a feature quivered, nor did a muscle of her body vibrate. Like a beauteous statue did she recline thus supported in the warrior's arms; her legs stretched upon the roof, her body in a half sitting posture, with her head lying upon his shoulder. It was that total abandonment of her person which, arising from a profound trance, left her in all the natural and unstudied grace of that position which her limbs and body happened to take as De Colmar gently deposited her there; and as his eyes swept along her motionless form, he could not help observing, even in the midst of the alarms which he was experiencing on her account, the marvellous symmetry, transcendant loveliness, and ravishing perfection of that shape, over all the flowing outlines and rich proportions of which his looks thus rapidly travelled. Then upon her cold but polished brow did he imprint a soft kiss; and from her forehead his lips wandered to her mouth, the rich vermillion of which was now of a fainter and more roseate hue; and to his unspeakable joy he beheld her superb form moving gently in the half-embrace in which he sustained it.

'She lives! she lives!' he exclaimed, in a tone of fervid enthusiasm; and, placing his hand upon her heart, he felt the feeble pulsation of returning vitality.

At that moment the venerable Bernard returned with a drinking-horn full of water; and the knight sprinkled the countenance of Satanais with the refreshing fluid. Beneath the olive clearness of her transparent skin, the hue of the carnation slowly, slowly retinted her soft cheeks; her bosom swelled with a long heaving, as if ridding itself of a suffocating sensation, and as it fell again her lips moved with the relief occasioned by a full and easy respiration. Then she slowly opened her eyes, those splendid orbs that now shone with the subdued lustre of a gazelle's, and looking up into the countenance that bent over her, she smiled with an ineffable sweetness on recognizing the handsome features of Sir Ernest de Colmar.

'Fear nothing, beloved Satanais,' he said, gently pressing her in his arms; 'nor torture yourself with disagreeable reminiscences. Your enemies are defeated, the base Carthusian has fled.'

'And that youth, in the bright armor—your unknown friend?' murmured the Daughter of Satan, her countenance expressing a sudden anxiety; 'what has become of her—of him, I mean?'

'He is safe—uninjured and scatheless like myself,' answered De Colmar. 'But do not rack your brain, dearest Satanais, with thoughts concerning all that has just passed,' exclaimed the knight, in a tone of tender entreaty and remonstrance; for he failed not to notice that the dark houri had just spoken of the unknown in the female gender, although she had instantaneously corrected herself, and as De Colmar entertained not the slightest suspicion of his brave deliverer's real sex, he naturally fancied that the mind of Satanais was somewhat disturbed and unsettled by all that had just occurred.

'I am better now—much better,' she said, fixing upon the Austrian a look of impassioned fondness: then suddenly

remembering, or else perceiving, that she had been wounded, a wild expression of terror swept over her magnificent features, as her eyes settled for a few moments upon the linen which bandaged her arm. 'Who paid me this attention?' she demanded abruptly, but ere her question could receive a reply, she caught sight of old Bernard, who was standing a few paces in the background, and her whole form was convulsed with the emotions attendant upon startling apprehensions suddenly re-awakened.

'Lady, 'twas I who dressed your wound as well as I was able, in the obscurity of the staircase tower,' said the octogenarian, now advancing.

'In the obscurity of the staircase tower,' repeated the Daughter of Satan, in a musing tone, and at the same time regarding the old man with an earnestness which seemed intended to read the thoughts uppermost in his mind; then, evidently experiencing an immense relief from the result of that scrutiny, and recovering her self-possession, she said, 'I thank you sincerely, good Messer Bernard, for your kindness; and to you, Ernest—oh! to you,' she added, in a low but tender tone,—'how can I express all the gratitude that I feel for your conduct towards me, and all the admiration I entertain for your prowess?'

'Talk not to me of gratitude and admiration, Satanais,' replied De Colmar, in the same subdued and whispering voice; 'but let me hear your lips breathe assurances of love!'

'Yes—oh! yes—I love you, Ernest, as never did woman love before,' answered the Daughter of Satan, throwing upon him all the reviving splendor of her magnificent eyes.

At this moment Linda and Beatrice appeared upon the summit of the staircase; and when they beheld their adored mistress reclining thus lovingly in the Austrian's arms, and observed the linen bandage upon her wound, they gave vent to their joy and gladness in fervid ejaculations. For an immense weight was evidently lifted from their minds all in a moment; and they experienced as sudden a relief from an intolerable state of apprehension as a person feels when dragged forth from the waves in which he was drowning.

'Dearest Satanais,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar, raising the dark houri gently to her feet, and abandoning his own kneeling posture at the same time, 'I shall now leave you to the attentions of your handmaidens, while I descend to look after that brave unknown, who has once again proved of such seasonable and important assistance to me in the moment of peril.'

'I will accompany you, Ernest,' exclaimed the Daughter of Satan, clinging to his arm. 'I feel quite recovered now——'

'But you must obtain at least an hour's repose ere we resume our journey, Satanais,' interrupted Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'Yes, you stand in need of rest after the severe shock you have just undergone. It yet wants an hour to sunset, and if you will consent to rest yourself for a little while in this good old man's cell, we will then pursue our way to the nearest hostel, at which we can take up our quarters for the night. Besides, your wound may require the attention of your handmaidens——'

'Yes, dear lady, we must conjure you to follow the advice which his excellency gives you,' said Linda, in a tone of earnest entreaty.

But still Satanais hesitated, and still she clung to De Colmar's arm, looking up the while into his countenance with a singular and mysterious expression of mingled fondness and apprehension depicted upon her features.

'No, I will not leave you, Ernest,' she said in a faint tone; and he suddenly felt that she clung to him with a heavier weight. 'No, no—we must not separate, Ernest—dear Ernest—you must not leave me,' she murmured, her splendid head drooping on his breast, as she articulated those words with difficulty, and in a voice that every instant became fainter and fainter. 'No—I will not part from you; besides, there is—Bernard—and—and—An——'

The remaining syllable of the forest-maiden's name died upon her lips, as she sank insensible upon the breast of her lover.

'O God! she has fainted once more!' he exclaimed. 'Linda—Beatrice——'

'We are here, your excellency,' cried the handmaidens, pressing forward and receiving their unconscious mistress from his arms.

'Bear her into my cell,' said Old Bernard, 'and you will there find everything requisite to restore her! Do not alarm yourselves on her account; 'tis the exhaustion produced by loss of blood and overwrought feelings—and it were only an act of common prudence to insist that the lady should pass the

night in my humble tenement, which I cordially offer for her use. She will rise in the morning refreshed and able to continue her journey, and the irritation of her wound will have subsided.

Thus speaking, the venerable Bernard led the way to his cell, where the handmaidens placed their unconscious mistress upon the couch. The old man retired; but Sir Ernest de Colmar lingered a few moments to satisfy himself that his beloved Satanais was not in any actual danger; and upon receiving from Linda the assurance that the pulsations of her heart were gradually becoming stronger, he withdrew, closing the door behind him.

At the same moment one of the grooms, having ascended the spiral staircase, made his appearance on the roof of the Donjon, and accosting his master, the man said, 'I have made bold to follow your excellency hither to state that the stranger in the steel armor enjoined me to convey his farewells to your excellency——'

'What! has he taken his departure?' demanded our hero, seized with mingled surprise and vexation at this new proof of the unknown warrior's eccentricity of conduct.

'Yes,' responded the groom. 'He bid me inform your excellency that business of weight and gravity would not permit him to tarry longer; and retracing his way to the spot where he had left his steed browsing upon the grass on the bank of the Moldau, he galloped away in yonder direction.'

'That is the road towards Altendorf Castle,' said Bernard, observing the point indicated by the groom. 'But now that your excellency will become my guest for the night,' continued the old man, turning towards Sir Ernest de Colmar, 'it behoves me to inform you that beyond food for yourself and companions, and stabling with provender for your steeds, I am unable to offer any comfortable accommodations. I mean in respect to beds and warm chambers——'

'You are apologising to a man who has passed many and many a night upon the battle-fields of Hungary and Turkey,' said De Colmar, with a smile; 'and to whom, therefore, the absence of a downy bed and a curtained apartment can scarcely seem a privation. A morsel of bread and a cup of cold water will suffice for my supper; and, wrapped in the warm mantle which I carry fastened behind my saddle, I can lay me down in one of the desolate chambers of this ruined fortalice, with the certainty that slumber will soon visit mine eyes.'

'At all events I will render your excellency's sojourn here as little disagreeable as possible,' said Bernard. 'And first I will show your grooms where the horses may be stabled for the night.'

'Do so, kind-hearted old man,' rejoined our hero; 'and I shall await your return with some impatience, inasmuch as I am anxious to learn from your lips the legend attached to the three ruined fortalices.'

'I shall relate it with willingness,' observed the octogenarian, mournfully, 'but I cannot say that it will be with pleasure.'

Then, bidding the groom follow him, the old man turned to descend the spiral staircase, while Sir Ernest de Colmar went and tapped gently at the door of the cell. Linda came forth in answer to the summons, and by the caution which she observed in opening and closing the door, the knight instantaneously concluded that the Daughter of Satan had recovered from her swoon and was sleeping. The surmise proved to be correct; and he retired from the vicinage of the cell, rejoicing that all danger was passed and that the object of his love had sunk into a refreshing slumber.

Taking his station at that point whence the view embraced the two dilapidated fortalices of Manfredo and Georgey, the knight contemplated those dark masses of ruins which crowned their respective hills, and he marvelled what strange fatality could have reduced them, together with the Castle of Ildegardo, to their present lorn and deplorable condition. Presently his eye travelled away from the dismantled towers and crumbling battlements in the south-east and in the east; and, wandering over the entire landscape from the far-off horizon to the very wall of that ruined stronghold on whose Donjon he was now standing, his looks settled at last upon the spot which Bernard had pointed out to him with so much excitement, and where the trunk of a lightning-struck tree hung over the limpid Moldau.

Then, as De Colmar gazed down upon this spot, he remembered that the old man had spoken of it as infamously celebrated on account of having been the place where the remains of some

murdered priest were deposited; and by a natural transition of reflections, our hero began to marvel wherefore Satanais should have exhibited such lively emotions and so painful an excitement upon hearing Bernard touch on that dark deed of assassination. And —he knew not why—but a feeling of uneasiness began sowlly to creep into his mind, as those thoughts led him to ponder deliberately and intently upon the strange eccentricities which marked the manner of Satanais from the very first instant that she entered the circuit of this ruined castle; and now it suddenly struck our hero, with the vividness of an inspiration, that she had sought to lead him away so abruptly from the place in order to prevent him holding any farther discourse with Berard.

A vague and unknown terror came upon the Austrian knight as he pondered on all these things—and he trembled—yes, his fine manly form trembled from head to foot, beneath the influence of the presentiment which now struck him and made him feel that he was upon the eve of listening to strange revelations.

And while this sensation of uneasiness was still gaining on him, old Bernard re-appeared upon the roof of the Donjon; and after a few remarks respecting the arrangements he had made for the accommodation of the knight and his party, the venerable man commenced his narrative in the ensuing terms.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'A MORE splendid feudal fortalice than Ildegardo Castle existed not in Bohemia; and the vast estates belonging to the baronial stronghold were the finest specimens of agricultural richness in the whole kingdom. The gardens, which are now a waste, were in those times when I first knew them, a perfect terrestrial paradise, uniting all that was most delicious in fruitage with all that was most lovely in floral variety. Those grounds were traversed by a pellucid stream branching off from the more stately Moldau; and that rivulet meandered like distilled pearls or fluid crystal over its pebbly bed, the bottom of which was as visible as an eye-ball through a tear. By the side of delicious arbors it passed—now winding beneath the dark shade of overhanging verdure or the fragrant drapery of rose-trees—then expanding its silver bosom to the sun-light once more—and then again creeping under canopies of emerald verdure variegated with flowers. Thus flowed the pure stream, like an innocent child at play, through the gardens; while the Moldau, like a giant journeying on with solemn pace, rolled through the fat meadows, the waving woods, the lofty forests, and the yellow harvest-fields. The territory around these ruins is still in verdure and still full of beauteous scenery; but its present condition is nothing compared with its productive luxuriance, its agreeable variety, and its general attractiveness in those days when the proud banner of Ildegardo floated over this Donjon, and the lord of the castle feasted in his spacious halls!

The last Baron of Ildegardo was surnamed "*The Thunder.*" His father was a stern, austere, and morose man, who had lost his wife soon after their marriage, and who, for some reason or another, experienced a violent antipathy to female society. Thus alienating himself from the civilizing influence of the fair sex, he grew ferocious in manner and brutal in disposition. But he was brave as a lion; and if a neighboring baron dared to insult even the meanest of his vassals, Lord Ildegardo was wont to summon his warriors, buckle on his armor, mount his horse, and lead forth his gallant band to chastise the imperious offender. On this account was the terrible baron admired and eulogised by his vassals, the farmers on his estates, and the inhabitants of his villages—and, although his feudal retainers could not love him, they were at least proud of him as a master and a chief. An only son was the fruit of his marriage, and never was a child more deeply to be pitied on account of the loss of a tender mother. For, scarcely were the remains of that excellent lady deposited in the tomb, when the poor boy was entrusted to the care of lacqueys and valets, the nurses and other female dependants all being expelled from the Castle. As he grew up, he was kept almost a prisoner within the walls; and his father compelled him to devote nearly all his time to athletic exercises, martial games, and the use of the various weapons of attack and defence then in vogue. The

life of the young lord was not, therefore, a very happy one; and certain is it that he did not shed many tears when the tidings were one day conveyed to him that his father had suddenly died with a stroke of apoplexy.

'Well do I remember that occasion! The head steward or intendant of the castle and estates was an elderly man named Korali; and this functionary, the household physician, the priest, and myself, formed the party who repaired to the young nobleman's suite of rooms, to acquaint him with his sire's decease, and salute him as Baron Ildegardo. He was then eighteen years of age, and his fine form, rendered elastic and agile by constant training, was marked by strength, elegance, and grace. His hair was jet black, his eyes were dark as night, and yet as lustrous as when that self-same night is lit by a thousand lamps. His countenance possessed the aquiline shape of feature, with the elevated forehead, the arching brows, and the short upper lip, with its expression of supreme haughtiness. Such was the young Baron of Ildegardo at the age of eighteen, when he succeeded to the rank and estates which had been handed down in his family throughout countless generations.

'The impious pride of his father, who loved and admired nothing in his son save his martial skill and his wondrous perfection in horsemanship, had named him "*The Thunder;*" and all the vassals and dependants naturally conjectured that the education which the young lord had received would render him even more warlike in his pursuits and quarrelsome in his propensities than his father. But great was their surprise, and to some extent their disappointment also, when they found that immediately after his sire's funeral he cast aside the sword to grasp the wine-goblet, and threw off the helmet to assume the chaplet of flowers, wreathed by the hand of beauty. In a word, a total change suddenly took place within the walls of Ildegardo Castle; and the young lord seemed determined to indemnify himself for the austere mode of existence prescribed by his late father. He accordingly invited numerous guests, threw open the brilliant saloons to the splendid company of lords and ladies, retained a band of musicians and a troop of dancing-girls, and chose the fairest women from amongst his vassals to become his mistresses. His days were passed in diversions and amusements of all kinds, and his nights in festivity or licentious debauchery.

'The intendance of the castle and the management of the estates were left entirely in the hands of Korali; and so long as the Baron Ildegardo found his treasury full, his cellar well provided, his table laden with luxuries, his mistresses attired with magnificence, and his guests smiling and contented, he asked his steward no questions nor troubled himself with regard to the condition of his numerous dependants and vassals. The result was that Korali indulged with impunity in all that petty tyranny, favoritism, peculation, and injustice, for which his selfish nature and unprincipled character were so well adapted; and while he took good care to pander to all his master's extravagances, he was at the same time enriching himself. Thus the local taxation was augmented, heavy fines were imposed for the slightest offences, justice became venal, and the vassals of the neighboring barons, deeming themselves safe from chastisement at the hands of the indolent Ildegardo, began to set no bounds to their arrogance and even effected predatory incursions in certain parts.

'In this manner did a couple of years pass away; and the population of the baron's vast estates grew more and more dissatisfied, until their murmurs broke out into bitter complaints. But still the astute and designing Korali contrived to prevent these remonstrances from reaching the ears of the baron, who seemed to be every day sinking lower and lower into the slough of debauchery and dissipation. Deeply grieved was I to behold the emasculated character of my lord and the ruin with which Korali's mal-administration threatened him. But I was merely the under-bailiff at that time; and, although my position allowed me frequent opportunities of neutralising the oppressive and calamitous tendencies of Korali's proceedings, still I was utterly unable to obtain a private interview with my master.

'Two years, I said had passed under auspices so mournful to all the true friends of the young lord of Ildegardo; and at the expiration of that period Baron Manfredo, then the patrician owner of the powerful stronghold whose ruins now stand on yon south-eastern eminence, suddenly made an incursion at the head of all his vassals into my master's estates. The pretence

was that inasmuch as the late baron had at several times exacted large sums of money from Manfredo, this nobleman was now resolved to force repayment from the present lord of Ildegardo, or else to seize upon a portion of his estates as security for the liquidation of the amount. But the vassals of the young baron were not disposed to give Manfredo so cordial a welcome as he had hoped and expected; and flying to arms, they were content to accept Korali as their leader in the pressing emergency of the case. Then took place one of those terrific feudal fights which were unhappily so common at the time in this part of Bohemia; and victory declared itself in favor of Manfredo. Korali's band was slaughtered or dispersed; and he himself fled with all possible speed to the castle.

'It was now no longer practicable for this unprincipled man to conceal from Ildegardo the desperate position of his affairs; and indeed the consternation which prevailed throughout the stronghold was in itself sufficient to arouse the young lord from his dream of bliss. Awaking, therefore, from the false security into which he had been lulled, he acted with the promptitude and resolution of a man who suddenly perceives the stern necessity of looking his position in the face. Disdaining the consolations of his mistresses, who sought to sooth him by their meretricious blandishments, he hastily summoned all his vassals to arms, examined the treasury and the granary, inspected the armory, visited the fortifications, and made rapid but efficient arrangements not only to stand a siege but likewise to go forth and hazard another battle with the invaders.

'The evidences of neglect, waste, peculation, and injustice which now presented themselves on every side to the view of the baron, left him not a doubt relative to the mal-administration of Korali, whom he accordingly consigned to a dungeon to be dealt with on a more suitable occasion. From all sides the male adult vassals flocked in to combat beneath their lord's banner; and well do I remember how fervid was the enthusiasm which glowed within my breast, when I beheld my young master ride forth in complete armor at the head of his brave warriors. I longed to accompany them; but this glorious pleasure was denied me, inasmuch as I had succeeded to the post so recently occupied by the perfidious Korali, and I was therefore compelled to remain in charge of the fortalice itself.

'The encounter between the respective forces of Ildegardo and Manfredo took place within a few miles of the castle; and sanguinary was the strife. Two years of luxurious indolence had not enervated the arm of my noble young master nor deadened the spirit of his chivalrous soul—on the contrary, it almost seemed as if he had derived a superhuman vigor from that interval of effeminate repose. Wherever he struck, death followed the sweep of his weapon; the demon of slaughter appeared to follow the track of his waving plume. But Manfredo's vassals were more numerous; they were likewise flushed with recent conquest; and as the sun went down upon that memorable day, its beams shone upon our fugitive warriors whom the young lord of Ildegardo vainly endeavored to rally.

'Distracted at the prospect of inevitable ruin—blaming when it was too late that voluptuous indolence on his part which he considered as the primal cause of all the present misfortunes; and maddened by the disgrace which he had brought upon the hitherto untarnished name of Ildegardo, the young baron spurred his foaming steed away from the confused mass of his flying soldiery. Away he sped, urging the frightened animal onward at a desperate pace, and having no settled purpose in view, unless indeed it were to escape from the goading train of his own thoughts. But all on a sudden the horse fell and the baron was thrown heavily to the ground. The steed instantaneously rose and sprang frantically away, — shooting through the air like an arrow, and in a few moments disappearing altogether in the increasing obscurity of the evening. Then, feeling himself in every sense alone, the unhappy Ildegardo gave vent to all his consuming anguish; and the adjacent woods echoed to the piteous lamentations which he poured forth.

'"Oh! is not this the judgment of heaven upon me for my wickedness!" he cried, clasping his hands together. "Two years of dissipation, festivity, and unhallowed love had weaned me from my God; and it is thus that He reminds me of His existence and power. Oh! what opportunities have I lost!—what precious time have I wasted!—what degradation has stamped the two finest years of youthful manhood! But 'tis useless thus to repine, thus to aban-

don myself to despair! Oh! I must retrieve the fortune of this terrible day—I must rescue my name from obloquy, my vassals from the pillage of an invading force, and my ancestral halls from sack and plunder. But how can I do all this? O insensate wretch that I am! My own troops are defeated,—and I have not a single ally! Alas!—alas! in this moment of my bitter need, I would even accept the friendship and the aid of Altendorf's lord himself, chief of a tremendous tribunal though he be."

'Scarcely were these words uttered in a tone expressing all the violent energy of desperation, when Ildegardo was recalled to himself by the sudden appearance of a warrior who burst as it were from the adjacent wood. He was clad in a complete suit of sable armor; his vizor was closed, and the black plumage waved over his head. But Ildegardo knew that it was the proud Baron of Altendorf who thus strangely and promptly answered the species of invocation which had just fallen from his lips; and the young lord was so astonished by this almost preternatural occurrence, or rather wondrous coincidence, that his tongue refused to give utterance to a word, and he stood gazing in superstitious terror upon the proud chief whom report declared in shuddering whisper to be the chief of the most awful tribunal that ever wrapt its proceedings in an impenetrable mystery.

'"Thou didst say that my succor would be welcome," said the Baron of Altendorf; "and I am ready to give thee mine aid. But every moment's delay will only serve to render thy position more precarious, and thine affairs less easy to be retrieved."

'"Save me from dishonor, mighty chief!" exclaimed the Baron of Ildegardo. "Lend me thine assistance to repulse the victorious Manfredo, and I will evermore remain bound to thee by the most solemn bonds of gratitude and of friendship."

'"That recompense is not sufficient, my lord," answered the Baron of Altendorf. "Hitherto thou hast scorned my friendship and avoided my companionship; and therefore I now neither seek thee as a friend nor accept thee as a companion in the chase or the festive hall.'

'"Then upon what terms will your lordship assist me to reconquer my possessions and save my castle from the invaders?" asked the young baron, driven almost to despair. "As you yourself ere now declared, every instant is precious; Manfredo is advancing at a rapid pace towards the time honored towers of Ildegardo——"

'"Listen!" exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, in a deep and solemn tone. "The report has doubtless reached thine ears that I am the presiding authority of a secret jurisdiction, which extends its mysterious influence throughout Bohemia. That jurisdiction is known as the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue; and to its service are votaries dedicated even from the cradle, in the same manner that they are vowed and destined to the service of the church."

'"Proceed, my lord!" cried the young baron, shuddering he scarcely knew why; but there was doubtless something in the mere allusion to that awful tribunal which made his blood run cold in his veins; for such is the effect invariably produced upon those in whose ears the dreaded name is breathed, be it never so whisperingly. "Proceed!" he said, with mingled impatience and apprehension; "and declare the terms upon which thou wilt grant me thy succor."

'"Swear to devote thy first-born child to the service of the Bronze Statue," answered the Baron of Altendorf; 'and in a few hours thine enemies shall be scattered like chaff before the wind! Decide at once—there is not a minute to lose."

'"I swear!" ejaculated the desperate and half-frenzied Ildegardo; and then recoiling from the promise which he had made, and which was so tremendous in its very vagueness, he would have recanted on the spot—but it was too late. For the Baron of Altendorf called in a loud tone for his warriors to come forth; and in a moment from the dark shades of the wood poured his armed retainers, who had been concealed there to watch the chances of the fight between the other two feudal lords.—The bewildered Ildegardo was lifted by powerful arms to the back of a caparisoned war-steed; while the Baron of Altendorf mounted another, and the whole party instantaneously pressing on, the young lord found himself as it were carried away by a torrent of circumstances which he could no more control, than he could by his own unaided strength stem the power of the armed force in the midst of which he

was now borne rapidly along. Moreover, the most startling incidents were now succeeding each other with a bewildering speed; for in a short time the Baron of Altendorf's band, debouching from a road leading into an open space which Manfredo's troops were traversing in the supposed security of conquest, fell upon that squadron of invaders with irresistible fury. The moon had risen to light the scene of carnage, and fearful was the struggle for upwards of two hours. But Ildegardo himself performed prodigies of valor, and the Baron of Altendorf dealt destruction wherever his sword struck. A panic seized upon Manfredo's retainers, the rumor spread like lightning amongst them that the chief of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue was combatting on behalf of Ildegardo. They fled in confusion, and ere the clepsydra marked the hour of midnight, Manfredo and the few survivors of his broken band were galloping away with the whirlwind speed of desperation!

'The deliverance of the estates and Castle of Ildegardo being thus accomplished, the Baron of Altendorf would not even tarry to partake of the slightest refreshment; but, leaving his wounded retainers to the care of the young lord, he gathered the bulk of his followers together, and led them away toward his own stronghold. The remainder of that memorable night was passed in festivity and rejoicing at Ildegardo Castle; and the youthful baron became as effectually the hero of the scene as if he had not originally experienced defeat, and had subsequently been indebted to his own unassisted resources for the victory. In the course of a few days Baron Manfredo sent emissaries to propose terms of peace, and these were granted on conditions particularly favorable to my noble master. Korali, the unjust intendant, was released from his dungeon and discharged from the baron's service; he was moreover commanded to quit his lordship's estates, an injunction which he speedily obeyed, inasmuch as he was too deeply detested to be able to find an asylum at the house of any one of the vassals;—and thus, stripped of his ill-gotten wealth, he was thrown a mendicant upon the world. I privately gave him a small sum of money ere he took his departure; but I experienced an indescribable relief when his back was turned upon the castle, inasmuch as I considered that man to be my master's evil genius. Indeed, it took two years of economy and prudential arrangements to enable me to restore the baron's affairs to a healthy condition; and I may declare without incurring the imputation of vanity, that at the expiration of this interval his revenues were as free from encumbrance, his estates as flourishing, his vassals as happy, and his tenants as prosperous, as they were in the best days of his father's lifetime.'

CHAPTER LXXII.

CONTINUATION OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'The two years which thus passed away, were spent by the young Baron of Ildegardo in a most exemplary manner. Dismissing his gallant ladies and his dancing-girls, and making a proper selection in the choice of his friends, he seemed determined to expiate all his former misconduct. He visited his principal tenants—saw that his vassals were well cared for—and superintended the various improvements which I suggested in respect to his estates. The hours which he spared from these useful occupations were devoted to hunting; and in that sport his lordship speedily excelled his patrician neighbors. Thus the two years passed happily away.

'It was about the expiration of this period that I first heard the friends and dependents of my noble master expressing their wonder and regret that he did not seem to think of matrimony. He was now twenty-two years of age, and, as I have already stated, one of the handsomest men on whom the sun ever shone. At length, yielding to the entreaties of those who wished him well and who knew that I enjoyed some degree of influence with him, I ventured to report to his ear the observations that had been made; but he treated the matter with an apparent levity—although he doubtless felt deeply on account of the terrible compact which he had made with the Baron of Altendorf, and the dread of which was assuredly the cause of his forbearance from matrimony, But that secret was unknown to me at the time: the baron locked it up in his own breast; and I, fancying that he thought not of marriage simply because he was acquainted with no lady whom he deemed worthy of his hand, resolved to adopt some

means to turn his thoughts into the channel so much desired by his friends. I accordingly obtained the portraits of the most beautiful daughters of the neighboring chieftains, and hung them all in my suite of apartments at the castle. When this arrangement had been privately made, one of the baron's friends, acrording to a previously concerted mode of procedure, said to me at the banquetting-table, "I understand, Messer Bernard, that you have recently been making a collection of pictures, and now that the thought strikes me, I beseech permission to visit your chambers and inspect the works of art which you are treasuring there!'

'"What! Bernard a patron of the fine arts!" exclaimed Lord Ildegardo, in whose presence the observation had been purposely made; "I fancied that he was too much occupied with leases and rent rolls, architects and gardeners, accounts and money-matters, to find any leisure for more gentle pursuits."

'"Nevertheless," exclaimed the friend who had previously spoken, "I can assure your lordship that Messer Bernard has managed to collect several beautiful pictures, chiefly portraits, I believe. I have the statement from his own valet, and your lordship perceives that Messer Bernard does not offer any contradiction."

'"If this be really true, Bernard," said the baron, whose curiosity was excited, "I must crave permission on my own behalf for the inspection of your curiosities; and there is no time like the present for the gratification of the whim."

'"Be it so, my lord," I said, without any apparent emotion; and rising from the table, I led the way to my own suite of apartments, accompanied by the baron and all the guests who were present on the occasion.

'His lordship derived far more interest from this inspection than he had anticipated. The assemblage of portraits presented a perfect galaxy of beauty; and he contemplated them one after another with unfeigned admiration. But at last his gaze was completely fascinated by the portrait of a charming creature, with golden hair, a seraphic complexion, and yet with eyes of the deepest blackness. Even on the canvass did her figure seem floating with an indefinable grace; and the animation of virgin innocence and youthful loveliness lighted her angelic countenance and shed a halo around her. Upon this portrait did the baron gaze in silence for a long time; but the gathering rapture of his soul might be read upon his features. It was not difficult to observe that his pulse began to beat with a new sense of existence, and that the feelings with which that lovely countenance and graceful figure inspired him were far different from those that he had experienced in the society of the mistresses who had once held him enthralled in their silken chains. At length, unable to restrain his transport, he turned towards me, exclaiming, "Oh! my dear Bernard, if that were anything more than a fancy-portrait, and if the original were young and beautiful at this moment as she is represented there, I would hasten to throw myself at her feet and demand permission to love and woo her."

'"Your lordship will therefore be pleased to learn," said I, "that the original of this portrait is not only in existence at the present moment, but unmarried and likewise a near neighbor. Indeed, her residence is scarcely two hours' ride from Ildegardo Castle."

'"O, Bernard, is this possible? or are you deceiving me?" exclaimed the baron, in a perfect enthusiasm of rapture. "Who is the enchanting creature? and where does she dwell?"

'"The original of that picture, my lord," said I, "is the Lady Emilia, the youngest and loveliest daughter of Baron Georgey."

'"Alas!" exclaimed Ildegardo, his countenance suddenly falling; "scarcely have I imbibed intoxicating draughts of love, when I am forced to drink deep of the bitter bowl of despair. For has not the Baron Georgey sworn to devote all his daughters to the service of the church, in the hope that their prayers will move heaven to restore to him his only son, who was stolen in his boyhood long years ago?"

'"It is true, my lord," I answered, "that the only son and heir of Baron Georgey was, supposed, when a little child, to have been stolen by gipsies, some twenty-two or twenty-three years ago,—true also that the baron did, in the wildness of his grief at the time, dedicate his daughters to the service of heaven. But the Lady Emilia was born four or five years subsequently to that oath; and I have been assured that inasmuch as she could not possibly have been included in her father's vow, she is not destined to take the veil as all her sisters have done. Nay, more—I

will venture to promise that your lordship's addresses will not be rejected by the Lady Emilia, nor viewed with displeasure by Baron Georgey."

'My noble young master embraced me when I gave him these assurances; and the very next morning I despatched a confidential friend to Baron Georgey to pave the way for a formal visit on the part of Lord Ildegardo. My emissary was favorably received by the venerable baron, who frankly declared that such an alliance as the one suggested would be well pleasing to him; and on the ensuing day my noble master proceeded with a splendid retinue to Georgey Castle. His reception was of the most flattering description; and he found, to his delight, that so far from the charms of the Lady Emilia having been in any way exaggerated by the artist who painted her portrait, sufficient justice had scarcely been done to her transcendent loveliness. On her side, the young lady was far from displeased with the handsome person, agreeable manners, and courteous attentions of the Baron of Ildegardo; and thus the loves of this noble pair commenced under auspices of the most favorable character. For a few months did the courtship last, and during that interval my master was a daily visitor at Georgey Castle. At length he formally demanded the hand of the Lady Emilia in marriage; and her father, while signifying his consent, addressed him in the following manner:—

'"My dear young friend, I give thee my daughter in the full confidence that thou wilt make her happy; but in thus bestowing my only remaining treasure upon thee, I render myself, as it were, childless. Her mother, who hath long been a saint in heaven, made me the father of six children—one boy and five girls. The boy disappeared suddenly when only two years old; and there is every reason to believe that he was stolen by the wandering Zingarees. Four of my daughters have embraced the service of heaven, and dwell in the seclusion of that convent which I have built and endowed in the vicinity of my castle. The youngest and fairest of my children I now bestow upon thee; and, in the loneliness of my ancestral halls, shall I pass the remnant of my existence. If my long-lost son should not be restored to me, then thou wilt become the inheritor of my possessions; but I charge thee, as thou valuest thine immortal soul, that should he who was lost in his infancy be ever led back, either by accident or by heaven's mercy, to the home of his forefathers,—then I charge thee, I say, to surrender unto him the castle and the estates of Georgey. And that thou mayst be enabled to guard against the duplicity of impostors, and the frauds of false claimants, it is necessary to inform thee that my lost boy bore the mark of a mulberry on the upper part of his right arm. The hope that he will ever come back is nearly extinct within me; for twenty-three years have passed since the fatal day on which he was stolen by the gipsies. And yet there are times when a species of supernatural presentiment inspires me with the conviction that he yet lives; and in the silence of the night it often seems as if some good angel whispered the same in my ears. But the result is in the hand of God, who can bring the wanderer home if He will. Say, then, Baron of Ildegardo, wilt thou swear to act justly and honorably towards my son, should he re-appear at any time after my death and prove his identity?"

'"Most solemnly do I swear to fulfil your injunctions, venerable lord!" exclaimed the baron, pressing the old noble's hands respectfully to his lips.

'Three days after this conversation the marriage was celebrated with fitting splendor. Father Heracles, the venerable chaplain of Georgey Castle, pronounced the nuptial blessing; and the vassals on both estates celebrated the event with rejoicings, festivities, martial games, and grand hunts.

'Four months elapsed, and at the expiration of that period the beauteous Emilia imparted to her husband the intelligence that she found herself in a way to become a mother. Obedient to the impulse of joy which suddenly seized upon him, he clasped his lovely young wife in his arms, and lavished upon her the most affectionate caresses; but even while he was thus giving and receiving those tender kisses, a withering reminiscence flashed across his brain as a blight sweeps through the garden of roses, and all his joy was blasted in a moment, as a verdant tree is stricken dead by the lightning. But he had nevertheless sufficient self-command to conceal his agonizing thoughts from the beauteous Emilia; and hastily quitting her presence, he mounted his horse and galloped forth into the country, as if he sought to flee away from his own thoughts. Unattended did he thus

ride rapidly onward, and so completely absorbed was he by those harrowing reflections whence he endeavored to escape, that he did not notice the speed which he compelled his horse to maintain, nor how long he was thus remaining absent. But at length he was awakened from his reverie by hearing some one address him by his name; and suddenly pulling up his foaming steed, he raised his eyes and beheld the Baron of Altendorf.

'This dreaded nobleman was mounted on a coal-black horse, and likewise appeared to have ridden forth alone.—The Baron of Ildegardo shuddered as he met his looks; for it struck him that there was something ominous and of evil augury in this meeting.

'"I am well pleased that accident should have thus brought us together, my lord," said the Baron of Altendorf, in his deep voice, "and still more so that our encounter should occur at a moment when we both happen to be alone. For in the first place I have to offer your lordship my congratulations on the brilliant alliance which you have formed; and secondly I would fain learn whether there be as yet any prospect of your lordship's vow being accomplished by the dedication of a first-born to the service of the Bronze Statue?"

'Thus spoke the Baron of Altendorf, who was at that time a comparatively young man himself, his age being about thirty. He was tall in stature and somewhat inclined to be portly in his person; his countenance was swarthy; his looks were forbidding; and altogether his aspect was calculated to inspire emotions of mingled awe and aversion.

'"My lord," exclaimed the Baron of Ildegardo, experiencing those feelings now, "I can scarcely believe it possible that you will hold me bound to a pledge so rashly made and involving a matter concerning which I am utterly ignorant. For the very nature of the service to which, in my despair, I vowed my first-born, is unknown to me; nor do I entertain the slightest notion of the attributes of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue."

'"At the moment when you formed the compact with me, my lord," said the Baron of Altendorf, sternly, "there was no time to enter into explanations upon those points. But as you must naturally experience a profound curiosity in that respect, I will now enlighten you to some extent. The Tribunal of the Bronze Statue is the oldest and most terrible of those Secret Societies which originated in Westphalia and which are known in Germany by the name of the *Vehmgericht*.

'"The organisation is shrouded in mystery; and its proceedings are involved in the strictest secrecy. Its influence extends throughout Bohemia; and appalling is the punishment which it inflicts for those offences that come within its cognizance. Being a secret association, it requires secret members and agents in all parts; and these votaries of the Bronze Statue consist of women as well as of men. For over every grade and class of society does the tribunal exercise its supervision; and those who are devoted to its service are bound by the most tremendous oaths to denounce in secret all who offend against its laws—be they even father, mother, brother, or sister whom the individual may thus be called upon to inform against."

'"And it is to this atracious occupation of a secret spy that I have pledged my first-born!" exclaimed the Baron of Ildegardo, no lenger able to restrain his indignation. "By the living God! sooner than allow son or daughter of mine to play the part of assassin in the dark—to become ten thousand times worse than the hired bravo, and infinitely more despicable than the wretch who stabs his enemy in the back——'

'"Hold, my lord!' said the Baron of Altendorf, waving his hand so imperiously and with such an evident consciousness of superior power that my noble master felt himself over-awed,—aye, and even subdued and spirit-crushed all in a moment, as if beneath some supernatural influence fraught with unearthly terror. "Dare not to malign the servitors of the Bronze Statue, or I swear that thou shalt be numbered amongst its victims! And that this is no idle menace I will soon convince thee."

'Having thus spoken, the baron blew a shrill whistle which he took from the breast of his doublet; and the summons was almost instantaneously answered by the appearance of three or four armed horsemen who galloped up to the spot. The Baron of Ildegardo was made their prisoner in a moment; for the awful consternation which was upon him prevented him from offering the slightest resistance. The ruffians blindfolded his eyes and bound him on

to his horse; and then the whole party set off at a full gallop.

'The sun was sinking behind the western hills when this occurrence took place. Already had the Baron of Ildegardo been absent from his castle for several hours; and Lady Emilia was gradually becoming alarmed. I endeavored to console her, although I myself was somewhat astonished that my lord did not return; and my misgivings increased when I ascertained upon inquiry that he had ridden forth alone. I trembled lest some accident should have befallen him; and as the night deepened I could scarcely conceal my apprehensions from Emilia, much less sooth her own. Hour after hour passed;—midnight came, and still the baron came not. His affectionate wife was half distracted, and I could say nothing to console her. At length, towards one o'clock, we heard a steed gallop with thundering din over the drawbridge which had been left lowered in expectation of my lord's return; and in a few moments the horse's hoofs clattered with equal rapidity upon the stones of the court-yard. Wildly, with mingled joy and terror, did the Lady Emilia rush precipitately down from the apartment where we were seated, to receive her husband, for we both felt convinced it must be he; and I followed her ladyship, but at a less headlong rate. On the threshold she met the baron. But, holy God, what an aspect did he wear! His countenance was ghastly pale, his eyes were fixed with the glaring expression of horror, his plumed cap had fallen off, his hair was streaming wildly, and his disordered garments were all speckled with the foam flung from the mouth of the gallant steed which had evidently been ridden at a frantic pace.

'Emilia gave vent to an ejaculation of thrilling anguish as her husband, throwing himself from that panting steed, thus encountered her; but at the same instant all the pent-up horror which filled the unhappy young lord's breast, burst forth in a terrible moan,—and he sank senseless at her feet.'

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CONTINUATION OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'The resident physician was instantaneously summoned; and he ordered the baron to be conveyed to his chamber, divested of his clothing, and put to bed. This was done; and his lordship still continuing insensible, the physician was compelled to administer the most powerful restoratives. These succeeded in re-animating him; but he awoke from his stupor only to rave in a delirium. A composing draught was poured down his throat; and under the influence of the opiate he gradually became tranquillised, until he sank off into a profound slumber. When he opened his eyes again, the fever had left,—but he started up and glanced wildly around, as if in dread of encountering some terrible object. When, however, he recognised where he was and perceived the well-known face that was bending over him, his soul seemed to drink in the sunny smiles that shone upon his awakening sight, his apprehensions disappeared, and the gladness of an unspeakable relief suffused itself rapidly over his countenance. Catching the beauteous creature in his arms, he strained her to his breast, while she bestowed upon him the tenderest caresses; and he murmured in her ears, 'O Emilia, dearest Emilia, I have had a horrible—most horrible dream!'

'"Tranquillize your thoughts, my well beloved," she hastened to respond in a tone of fondness, that penetrated like a soothing balm in unto the very depths of his soul. "See! you are beneath your own roof, in the care of her who adores you and would die for you, and with the blessed sun shining grandly upon the world. You have therefore no cause for apprehension, my dearest husband; nor must you ponder upon aught that harrowed your feelings during the darkness of the night."

'And while she was thus speaking, the gentle Emilia drew back the heavy drapery from the windows, and the golden flood of sunlight was poured into the apartment.

'"Yes, the splendor of the orb of day is indeed cheering to the mind that in imagination has passed through a night of horror,' said the Baron of Ildegardo. "Come, my beloved Emilia, seat thyself by my bed-side, and I will unbosom my soul to thee; for thou art too affectionate as a wife, and too strong-minded as a woman, to permit me to keep any secrets from thee. Besides, there is one incident in my life which concerns thee, my Emilia, inasmuch as it relates to our expected first-born; and it is this incident which engendered the

horrible dream of the past night. Come, then—give thine attention—and I will unburthen my soul to thee."

'The baroness sat down by the side of the couch, took her husband's hand in her own, and bent her eyes upon him with mingled tenderness and painful suspense; for that prelude to the promised revelation had both amazed and startled her.

'"Three years have elapsed, my well beloved Emilia," he resumed, "since Baron Manfredo summoned his vassals and made a hostile incursion upon my estates. Of this circumstance you are doubtless aware; and you must likewise have heard that my own retainers, commanded by a certain Korali, were vanquished by the invaders. I then collected all the available force which I could muster on so short a notice, and marched against the victorious Manfredo. But, alas! his troops were not only flushed with conquest—they were likewise more numerous and better appointed than mine; and the result was the total route of my band of vassals.—Stung to madness by the disgrace of defeat, and driven to despair by the prospect of seeing my castle pillaged by Manfredo's hordes, I galloped away as if possessed by a demon; and being thrown from my horse, I remained upon the spot giving vent to my anguish in the bitterest lamentations—when the Baron of Altendorf suddenly emerged from the adjacent wood. A hurried but profoundly interesting colloquy took place between us; and he proffered his aid on a condition which he named, and which I accepted, in the fevered bewilderment of the moment—but which never, never shall be fulfilled, so long as I possess a sword to wield and an arm to raise it."

'"And that condition, my beloved husband—tell me what it was!" exclaimed Emilia, shuddering with a vague but horrible presentiment—for the rumors respecting the connexion of the Lord of Altendorf with some terrible fraternity or secret organization, had not failed to reach her ears.

'"It was a condition, Emilia," answered the Baron of Ildegardo, in a tone of the deepest solemnity, "the bare thought of which animates me with the same effect as if I had sold my own soul to Satan! But I will not torture thee with suspense, Emilia. Know, then that the terms imposed upon me by the Baron of Altendorf, were that I should dedicate my first-born child, whether male or female, to the unholy service of that secret tribunal of which he acknowledged himself to be the chief!"

'"God protect us!" exclaimed Emilia, turning deadly pale and convulsively pressing her husband's hand. 'This is a terrible revelation, my Ildegardo,' she added; for her imagination instantly associated the adventures of the past night, whatever they might have been, with the circumstances her lord was now detailing.

'"Yes, it is a dreadful thing to contemplate, my well-beloved," continued the baron; "but it would be far worse were the dream which I had last night an actual reality. For then should I indeed be aware that the mystery of the Bronze Statue is something more awful—more appalling—more hideous, than the imagination could possibly conceive, unless enlightened on the tremendous subject; and I should likewise feel the horrible certainty that a tribunal possessing so frightful an engine of punishment, must also have the power of enforcing its arbitrary decrees and exacting the fulfilment of all conditions and agreements made with its members. But as, thank heaven! the horrors of the past night were merely a dream—the shocking offspring of a fevered fancy——"

'"Oh! tell me that dream, Ildegardo!" exclaimed Emilia, exercising all her physical energies to subdue the shuddering that crept with a cold and snake-like sensation upon her, and exerting all her moral powers to assume a degree of composure which she was so far from experiencing in reality; for the fact of her husband's prolonged absence and the dreadful stare in which he had returned home, filled her mind with the harrowing conviction that whatever he had gone through during that interval was *not* a dream.

'"Yes—I will relate to you as much of that terrific vision as I have the courage to reveal," said the baron. "You remember, dearest Emilia, that you yesterday whispered in my ear the intelligence that in a few months you will become a mother; and although my first feeling was one of indescribable joy, my second was one of a bitterness as profound and ineffable. For I remembered the horrible compact with the Baron of Altendorf; and I thought within myself that if, when our first-born grew up, that dreadful chieftain should possess the power to compel the fulfilment of the bargain, your soul and

mine would know no bounds to their despair! Maddened by these reflections I quitted you hastily, mounted my horse, and galloped away with whirlwind speed, as if to escape from the companionship of my wretched, wretched thoughts. But as if nothing were to be wanting to drive me to desperation, accident threw me in the way of the Baron of Altendorf; and the terrible chief, after some ironical congratulations upon my marriage, reminded me of my compact which I formed with him three years ago. Then, in the course of a colloquy, every word of which comes vividly back to my recollection as if it were not a dream, the baron entered into long and fearfully minute explanations concerning the tribunal of the Bronze Statue; and then methought——"

'But those explanations, Ildegardo?' said Emilia, in a stifling voice, as she bent down her head upon his shoulder, in order to conceal her face; for she *felt* that she was ghastly pale, and that there was a rigid expression of horror imprinted upon her features.

'"Would'st thou, then, really exact from me the minutest details of that terrible dream?" exclaimed Ildegardo, caressing with his hand the beauteous head which was thus pillowed upon his shoulder; and he then repeated word for word all that the Baron of Altendorf had said to him, but still believing the whole to be a vision.

'"And now proceed with your narrative, dearest husband," said Emilia, swayed by an excruciating curiosity to know the rest.

'"I must hasten and bring the gloomy topic to an end," replied the baron; "or I shall persuade myself into a belief of its reality if I thus continue to ponder upon it. Know, then, that suddenly cutting short the conversation which I have just detailed, the Baron of Altendorf blew a shrill whistle; and the summons was obeyed by several armed men, who fastened a bandage over my eyes, and bound me upon my horse.—Then away, away we all went with maddening speed; and fearful was the excitement which I experienced in this portion of my dream—for remember, dearest Emilia, that it is but a dream which I am relating. Well, on we went for at least three hours, and then we suddenly stopped. I was made to dismount from my horse; but my eyes remained blindfolded, as I was conducted down a flight of stone steps into what appeared a long subterranean passage, that first went sloping downward, then was continued straight, and then seemed to rise with a steep ascent, terminating at last at a door. This was opened, and on we went through some vaulted place, the air of which struck like a mortal chill to the very marrow of the bones, and the distant echoes bearing evidence to its vastness. My impression at the time seemed to be that it was a place of tombs; for there was a sepulchral hollowness in those reverberations of our footsteps, as if it were the profound silence of the grave that was being thus awakened. At the expiration of a few minutes another door was opened, and I heard the gentle rippling of water. Then the bandage was suddenly torn from my eyes, the glare of torches flashed upon my sight, and the shuddering looks which I threw around the vaulted chamber where we thus paused, settled in another moment upon a huge piece of machinery, the aspect of which was enough to strike terror to the boldest heart. But scarcely had my vision embraced all the details of that hideous spectacle, when I was hurried away by the Baron of Altendorf and his party, and in an upper room did I behold the colossal image which gives its name to the dread tribunal of the Bronze Statue!"

'"Proceed—proceed, my dear husband!" exclaimed Emilia, in a voice that expressed all the terrible excitement of a rending anguish. "Do not pause to reflect upon these horrors."

'"No, I will not, my beloved wife," said the baron; "although they do belong only to a frightful dream. Yes, and the most hideous phase in that vision now occurred; for while I was lost in the mingled amazement, admiration, and terror, with which I contemplated the colossal image of the Blessed Virgin in whose presence I stood, the Baron of Altendorf whispered over my shoulder, the awful mystery connected therewith! O, Almighty God, if this were anything more than a dream—if it were possible that the tremendous secret which I then learnt could be associated with a reality ——"

'"Oh! give not way to these agonising reflections, my beloved husband," interrupted Emilia, now raising her head from his shoulder, and perceiving that his countenance was convulsed with horror; "but hasten to bring this painful history—this narrative of a shocking vision, I mean—to a conclusion," for

the affectionate wife was resolved to foster the impression that he had conceived, relative to his adventures being a mere dream. "Tell me then, Ildegardo—tell me," she cried, "what was the secret which you fancied that the Baron of Altendorf whispered so ominously in your ears?"

'"God forbid that I should repeat it, Emilia!" he exclaimed, in a tone of rending anguish. "No, that colossal statue—that hideous machinery——But I must avert my thoughts therefrom," he suddenly cried, gasping with a difficult utterance, as if his tongue were parched and ashes were in his throat. "Suffice it to say, my Emilia," he hastily continued, "that the baron's words shot through my brain like an arrow; and I was indeed impressed all in a moment with the tremendous conviction that the tribunal of the Bronze Statue must be all—aye, and ten thousand times more than its terrible chief had hinted to me. But I had not much leisure to give way to reflection, for while the anguish of the baron's revelation was still inflicting its poignancy upon my brain, I was hurried away from the presence of the colossal statue, into a room where jars, bottles, and various implements stood upon a table. This chamber we had previously traversed when repairing to the apartment where the bronze image stood; and on thus entering it a second time, the party paused on a sign from the Baron of Altendorf. Then this terrible chieftain addressed me, in his deep sonorous voice; and after reminding me that I was now full well acquainted with the means of the tribunal to afflict an appalling vengeance upon offenders, he warned me against cherishing either an intention to resist its power, or a hope that such an endeavor could possibly succeed, in respect to the compact which I had so solemnly formed. And he continued to observe, that in order to keep this compact perpetually in my mind, and to set as it were the seal of the Bronze Statue upon it, he would impress an indelible mark upon my flesh. Then his retainers seized rudely upon me, replaced the bandage over my eyes, and held my right arm stretched out at length, with the hand resting upon the table. All this was the work of an instant; and ere I had time even to think of what could be the meaning of the sudden proceeding, I felt a sensation as if the rowel of a spur were drawn rapidly round my wrist several times, producing a pricking and tingling pain. The operation lasted only a few instants; and, when it was completed, my conductors hurried me down the stairs, through the chamber where I had contemplated the awful machinery, and where I again heard the rippling of the stream which flowed beneath it,—thence into the place of tombs, which we traversed with rapid steps, and lastly along the inclining passages, that led to the stone staircase at the mouth of that accursed and mysterious subterranean. In a few moments we ascended to the open air once again; and, still remaining blindfolded, I was assisted to mount my horse. Then away we all galloped, our path appearing to lead for some distance through a forest; but the bandage had been so carefully tied over my eyes that I could see nothing. However, at length the waving of the trees ceased to fall upon my ears, and we then emerged on a hard road, along which our steeds thundered at a furious rate. My brain began to whirl, my senses grew bewildered, and methought that I was in the company of demons, who were bearing me away from this world to the place of eternal torture. All the horrors which I had witnessed, and all the terrible things that I had heard, came back to my memory with an overwhelming power, till my very thoughts turned to scorpions, lashing me into a frenzy.—Delirium seized upon me; and yet there was a momentary gleam of light and reason when the party suddenly halted, took the bandage from my eyes, wished me farewell, and galloped away in an instant. But no sooner had this circumstance occurred, than my own steed bounded furiously on once more, my thoughts resumed their frenzied gush, and like a madman was I borne on at whirlwind speed through the darkness of night. Gradually my memory became a complete blank, and I awoke to find myself lying on my own couch, with you, dearest Emilia, bending affectionately over me! But tell me, was not this a hideous dream—a frightful vision? Speak to me, my well beloved: wherefore do you thus avert your countenance? Emilia, dearest Emilia, why trembles your hand thus convulsively in mine? and, oh! wherefore now quivers your entire form? My God! that burst of anguish—what does it mean?"

'And the terrified Ildegardo sprang up in his couch, as a groan of unspeakable misery went forth from the lips of his young wife, notwithstanding all the

tremendous efforts she made to stifle those feelings of mortal agony which raged within her. But by the suddenness of that movement on his part, the sleeve fell back from his right wrist, and then a piercing scream thrilled from Emilia's tongue as her eyes caught sight of the arm thus bared.

'"Eternal God! it is *not* a dream," shrieked forth Ildegardo, his own looks at the same moment fastening upon the object which had thus put the crowning stone upon the colossal fabric of his wife's wretchedness. For around his wrist was traced a black mark, having the appearance of a narrow ribbon when viewed from a distance, but formed by a thousand little dark punctures when inspected closely. It had evidently been effected by some instrument having a small roller covered with innumerable little spikes or points, which indelibly marked the skin with the dye previously taken up by the instrument. Thus did the chief of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue imprint upon the baron's flesh a sign which, whenever caught by the shuddering glance, should cause the dread conviction to flash athwart the soul that the compact was a terrible reality, and that there was no deficiency of means to punish its violation.

'There is a grief which defies all power of description. It is made up of anguish and despair—an anguish which rends the soul with the poignancy of crucifixion—and a despair which strikes the lips dumb and the form motionless. Such was the state of mind to which the Baron and Baroness of Ildegardo were now a prey. Long and earnestly did they gaze upon each other; but the young lord read horror and distress in the eyes of his Emilia, and she beheld the same feelings expressed in his looks. Not a syllable of consolation could their lips utter—not a glance of solace could their eyes send forth. Their's was the woe—the ineffable woe of a father whose rashness had foredoomed his first-born to an unhallowed service—and of a mother who felt that her child was cursed even in her womb! At length they seemed to be struck with the simultaneous reflection that their grief was mutually felt, and that it was their duty to console each other; and yielding to this sentiment, they embraced with a fervor to which despair lent an almost frantic energy—mingling their sighs and tears as well as their kisses.

'For two or three hours did they remain in a conference, the solemnity of which was somewhat subdued by the melancholy tenderness which also characterised it; then, the baron having risen from his couch, they proceeded hand-in-hand to an apartment, to which Father Heracles was immediately summoned. For the reverend priest was at the time on a visit to the castle; and to his ears did the baron now reveal his terrible tale. The holy pastor heard the narrative with feelings of mingled amazement and grief; and when it was brought to a conclusion, he fixed his eyes upon the unhappy Emilia and burst into tears.

'"Counsel us, thou good old man," said the Baron of Ildegardo; "and guide us in this tremendous perplexity. For our hopes are now centred in thee, inasmuch as *here* is the damning proof of the power wielded by the tribunal of the Bronze Statue;" and, as he thus spoke, he exhibited the mark upon his wrist to Father Heracles.

'"But how can that mark be considered as a symbol and an emblem of the power of this secret tribunal?" inquired the priest.

'"Because the instrument with which this mark was impressed, must have been a miniature resemblance of the cylinders of that dread machinery—— But, O God! ask me no more upon the subject; torture me not with questions upon that point!" cried the Baron of Ildegardo, suddenly breaking from a deep solemnity of tone and manner into a voice and aspect indicative of an anguish bordering upon frenzy.

'"I beseech you, holy father," whispered Emilia, "not to touch again on those details from a full explanation of which his soul recoils with such intense horror."

'"Your wishes shall be obeyed, daughter," returned the venerable priest; then in a louder voice he exclaimed, "my dear children, let us pray to heaven for strength to bear the world's afflictions, and for wisdom to avert those which it is permitted to human prudence to grapple with."

'Thus speaking, Father Heracles sank upon his knees, an example which was instantaneously followed by the baron and baroness; and they all three prayed long and fervently. When their pious duty was concluded, they rose from their suppliant posture, and Father Heracles spoke in the following manner:—

'"Ye stand, as it were, my dear children, in the presence of a misfortune which has many aspects, and must be contemplated in many points of view. For not only is your expected first-born vowed and pledged to a secret service, the very mystery of which strikes terror to the soul—but the violation of that promise will provoke a vengeance which evidently has the power to strike deeply, and to which it is impossible to foresee the bounds. Unhappily all the secret associations which have sprung up in European society, have elaborate and intimate connexions of an ecclesiastical character; and among their chiefs, their members, and their votaries, are priests and nuns to be found. With sorrow do I make this admission in respect to the Catholic Church; but I am not disposed to shut mine eyes to a truth which is, alas! only too palpable. You will, however, ask me what reference my remarks have to the matter under consideration? I will tell you. The course which I shall recommend with regard to your first-born, is to dedicate the child even from its cradle to the service of heaven. The protecting influence of good angels will then be cast over your offspring; for Providence will not desert its elect. If a male child, it will be destined to a monastic life: if a female, to the seclusion of a convent. But inasmuch as the secret association of the Bronze Statue may have agents, votaries, and adherents in the monasteries and convents of Bohemia, let it be resolved that your first-born, on arriving at the proper age, shall enter a cloister in a foreign clime. There the civil and ecclesiastical laws will alike be a protection; and by these means your offspring will doubtless be saved from the consequences of the father's rash vow; while you, the parents, will be left to ward off the vengeance of the Bronze Statue as best you may. But I need not speak to you, my son," continued Father Heracles, now addressing himself specially to the baron, "upon such a subject; inasmuch as the matter will no doubt ultimately resolve itself into a feudal contest between the Baron of Altendorf and yourself. To punish what he will term your treachery, and to get you into his power—you and yours—he will march against you, and the torch of war will be lighted up on either side. But if conquest should declare in your lordship's favor, you may not only defeat an imperious enemy, but you may likewise have the satisfaction of striking a fatal blow at the very heart of this secret association. As for the rash vow which you made, I do not hesitate thus to counsel its violation: nay, more—as a man and a minister of heaven, I enjoin you to disregard so iniquitous a pledge. The observance thereof would be a greater crime than its renunciation; and for the latter do I grant thee absolution. Now ye have heard my advice, dear children," said the holy man in conclusion, "and it remains for you to pronounce your your opinion and your decision."

'"But my friends and retainers will upbraid me bitterly, or shun me as a mad man for thus dealing with my first-born child," exclaimed the baron, in despair.

'"Their reproaches would be more just and more poignant," answered the priest mildly, "if they were to learn your terrible secret, and find that you had taken no steps to rescue your offspring from the consequences of your rashness."

'"Oh! my beloved husband," exclaimed the weeping Emilia, "let me implore you upon my knees to follow the counsel of our reverend friend."

'"There is ample leisure for reflection," said the baron, bewildered by all the conflicting ideas that agitated in his brain.

'"But the tortures of suspense will hurry me to the tomb," urged the unhappy Emilia; "whereas consolation may at least be derived from a settled plan of proceeding. On my knees, then, do I implore you, my beloved husband——"

'"Rise, dearest Emilia," he exclaimed, snatching her to his breast; "your wishes shall be granted, and everything shall be as you desire!"

'The priest then pronounced, in slow and measured terms, a certain formula by virtue of which the first-born son or daughter of the Baron and Baroness of Ildegardo was vowed and devoted to the service of heaven; and this antenatal dedication was repeated by the young lord and his beauteous Emilia as they knelt at the holy father's feet. But as the last words of the votive prayer fell from their lips, a mocking laugh rang through the room; and the door, which they fancied to have been shut the whole time, was closed with a sudden violence.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

CONTINUATION OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'The Lady Emilia stood transfixed with terror—Father Heracles told his beads, and the Baron of Ildegardo rushed forward, threw open the door, and sprang into the passage with his sword drawn in his hands, for he was determined to chastise the eaves-dropper, whoever he might be. But observing no one in the long corridor nor yet catching the sound of retreating footsteps, he was struck by the consternation of a superstitious awe; and several minutes elapsed ere he could sufficiently compose himself to hasten into the hall and inquire whether any stranger had passed that way. The answer to this question was an affirmative; and it appeared from the statement of a page that a tall man, enveloped in a cloak which reached to the ground, had issued from the corridor and hurriedly left the castle about five minutes previously. Farther inquiry elicited the fact that another page had seen him enter the hall and pass into the corridor about half an hour before; but fancying that the individual was some friend of the baron's, the youthful servitor had taken no farther notice of the matter. Pursuing his investigation, the baron ascertained from the warders at the gate that the cloaked stranger in question had ridden up to the drawbridge, left his steed in charge of a groom; and, alleging that he had business with Lord Ildegardo, was suffered to pass into the fortalice. When he returned it appeared that he was proceeding at a very harried pace; and on issuing from the gate, he flung himself upon his horse and galloped away. But of all the persons who had thus seen him, none had caught a glimpse of his countenance, which was shaded by his overhanging cap and sable plumes; the Baron of Ildegardo was, therefore, unable to ascertain who this cloaked intruder was, but he strongly suspected him to have been the Baron of Altendorf.

'On returning to the room where he had left his wife and Father Heracles, the baron acquainted them with all the facts he had thus gleaned; and the incident by no means tended to tranquillize their minds. It was clear that some one had been spying their proceedings; and how much he might have learnt could not be conjectured.—Perhaps he had overheard all; and in this case the projected arrangement relative to the as yet unborn child was already known to the enemy. Long and solemn was the deliberation which ensued between the baron, the baroness, and the worthy priest; but no better scheme could be devised than the one which the holy father had suggested; and moreover the votive formula had been pronounced and the antenatal dedication to heaven had been made. It was, therefore, necessary to abide by an arrangement so solemnly ratified; and as the reverend priest, true to the spirit of his pastoral mission, addressed the baron and baroness in the consolatory language of religion, they grew more calm and derived comfort from his words. At the intercession of Emilia he took up his residence altogether in Ildegardo Castle, the Baron Georgey consenting to this step at the request of his daughter.

'The occurrences which I have just been relating took place about twenty years ago; and it was a few weeks afterwards that Lord Ildegardo received into his service a new page. This was a young man of about four or five and twenty years of age; and his name was John Zitzka! Yes,—the present ruler of the destinies of Bohemia entered the household of my noble master as a humble servitor; indeed, it was only as an act of charity that the baron thus received him. For the young man was a houseless, starving, ragged wanderer at the time; and he had nothing to recommend him save his dire penury and deep distress. He bore testimonials from no former master, nor would he give any account of himself that was considered at all satisfactory. The little he said upon the point was to the effect that he had experienced many and cruel misfortunes, that his friends had abandoned him, that he had powerful enemies seeking to crush him, and that his only crime was having loved a lady far superior to himself in social position. But he was eloquent for a moment when he declared with a lofty pride that he had never done aught to stain his good repute; and then he threw himself upon the bounty and the generosity of Lord Ildegardo. Nor did he appeal in vain; but, as I have already stated, he was received into the service of my master.

'At that time he had not lost the sight of one of his eyes; and his countenance was remarkably handsome, de-

spite the lines of care and deep mental suffering which were traced upon it. His form was tall and well proportioned; his limbs denoted great muscular power; and there was something in the expression of his eyes and the curl of his lip which indicated a strong mind struggling against a sense of misfortunes which would have overwhelmed an ordinary mortal. At that period none foresaw the future greatness of the man who was destined to break the royal sceptre of Bohemia and raise the Phrygian cap of Liberty on the point of his lance; but often, as I watched the workings of his countenance when he was plunged in a deep reverie and fancied himself unobserved, I thought within myself that he would not be doomed to remain all his life in a dependant condition. Not that there was any intellectual superiority depicted upon the lineaments of John Zitzka,—no, for I had seen many, many countenances on which the word "*Mind*" was more deeply impressed. But there was a firmness of purpose evinced in his looks, an iron resolution stamped upon his features, and the reflex of an indomitable spirit apparent in his haughty smile, which forced upon me the conviction that I beheld in John Zitzka a man of dauntless energy, inflexible determination, and of inexhaustible perseverance. To say that he soon became a favorite at the castle, would be perhaps an exaggeration; inasmuch as his manners were too gloomy and reserved at one time and too abrupt and even blunt at another to render him either affable or agreeable. But his generous disposition, his dauntless bravery in the boar hunt, his skill as a horseman, his experience in the uses of all martial weapons, and the fearlessness with which he invariably espoused the cause of the weak against the strong in any disputes that occurred amongst the baron's dependants,—all these traits won at least the good will of the men and the admiration of the women.

'The debt of gratitude which John Zitzka owed the baron for taking him into his service, was speedily repaid,—for on two separate occasions within the first few months of his residence at the castle did the young man save his lordship's life. The fact was that the baron became more and more attached to the sports of the field and the forest as he found that they succeeded in diverting his mind from brooding over the *one* grand misfortune of his existence; and the Lady Emilia, observing that such was the effect of those pursuits, encouraged her beloved husband to devote his time to them. Zitzka apparently found a similar relief from the contemplation of his own secret afflictions, whatever they were; and he was, therefore, a constant attendant upon his noble master on those occasions.

'One day the baron, having outstripped his followers in the ardor of the chase, was thrown from his horse just at the very moment when a monstrous boar was turning ferociously round upon him. Another instant, and Ildegardo would have been no more; but a horseman galloped up to the spot,—sprang from his steed,—attacked the furious animal; and, after sustaining some severe injuries, succeeded in despatching it. Thus was the baron's life saved; and his lordship failed not to proffer his sincerest gratitude to the valorous Zitzka. On another occasion the circumstances of the chase led the hunting train along the banks of the Moldau; and in leaping a diverging streamlet, the baron's horse missed its footing upon the opposite side and fell back into the water. The river was swollen with recent rains, and the current, which flowed rapidly, instantly swept the baron and his steed into the middle of the flood. All his attendants were paralysed with fear, save *one*,—and this was John Zitzka. To leap from his own steed, plunge into the Moldau, and swim to the rescue of his master, all this was the work of a moment. The baron's position seemed almost desperate, for his feet were entangled in the stirrups, and the drowning steed was dragging him rapidly to destruction. The quick glance of Zitzka saw in a moment what was to be done,—and with his dagger he cut the stirrup-leathers, thus extricating the baron from his perilous embarrassment. The steed was swept away, but Lord Ildegardo reached the bank in safety; and again did he pour forth his gratitude to his gallant deliverer. Nor less, on returning to the castle, did John Zitzka receive the heartfelt thanks of Lady Emilia, who presented him with a blue silk scarf which she herself had embroidered in gold with her own fair hands. In the midst of this scarf a wreath of flowers, exquisitely worked, encircled the letter E; and the moment John Zitzka caught sight of that device, his whole countenance became

animated with such an expression of joy as I had never seen it assume before; and, falling upon one knee in token of respect towards the baroness, he said, 'Noble lady, I receive your gracious gift with heartfelt gratitude; and it is the more welcome inasmuch as it contains an initial which not only belongs to your own Christian name, but likewise to that of *her* whom I dared to love and who is now no more!"

'Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself and feeling annoyed that in the agitation of his emotions he should have made the remark, Zitzka bowed hastily and retired with a strange abruptness. This anecdote has little or nothing to do with the main thread of my narrative; but I mention it as an incident furnishing some idea of the mysterious character of that man who has since made all Europe ring with his renown!

'I must now observe that soon after the events which made Father Heracles acquainted with the Baron of Ildegardo's fatal secret, he undertook a journey to Prague, where he remained for some weeks; but on his return to the castle he refused any explanation of the motives of his absence; alleging, however, that time would clear up the mystery. The baron could not help thinking that the holy father's visit to the capital had been in some way connected with his own affairs; but his thoughts were soon diverted into another channel, for the period was now at hand when the Lady Emilia was to become a mother. All the vassals upon the Ildegardo estate made immense preparations to do honor to the event. Baron Georgey, Emilia's father, was confined to his own feudal dwelling by a severe illness; but a courier was in readiness to convey thither the interesting intelligence the moment the birth should take place. Father Heracles and the Baron of Ildegardo remained together in an apartment near the chamber of the Lady Emilia, who was attended by the resident physician of the castle and the usual servitress. At length the crisis came; and it was at mid-day, in the month of August,—twenty years ago,—that the Baroness of Ildegardo gave birth to a daughter.

'"Alas! alas!" exclaimed the baron, when the physician who brought him this intelligence had retired, and he was once more alone with Father Heracles; "I experience no joy in the knowledge that I am now a parent! For my rashness has foredoomed this innocent child to the seclusion of a cloister; and when torn from the world to be immured in a convent, she may detest and abhor the heartless sire who will consign her to a living tomb."

'"Fear not that such will be her feeling, my son," said the reverend priest, "From her very infancy will she be reared with the impression that she is destined to take the veil; and thus the idea will grow up with her, becoming as it were a part of her nature, and accompanying the development of her mind. In this manner will she be trained to look only heaven-ward even from the cradle; and should worldly thoughts ever intrude into the recesses of her soul, she will think of the blessed saints and holy martyrs, and long to imitate them somewhat by the sacrifice of all the selfish inclinations which bind weak and erring mortals to the gaud, glitter, and pleasure of life."

'"And yet it is hard—oh! it is hard," exclaimed the baron passionately, "to have my first-born child torn from me at an age when her beauty, her accomplishments, and her virtues, may render her parents proud of her, and likewise encourage the noblest youths of Bohemia to seek to win her as a bride."

'"Those observations on the part of your lordship," said the priest, in a tone of bland remonstrance, "would almost lead me to infer that you repent of the step you took five months ago, in dedicating your then expected first-born to heaven."

'"Repent! ejaculated the baron; "no, *that* is not the word, because the step was rendered imperiously necessary. But I repent of my own rashness in having made the appalling contract with the Baron of Altendorf; and I curse the existence of that infernal tribunal the terrors of which have brought me to the present pass. Oh! for vengeance upon that secret association!—Oh! for the power to uproot it from the land!" cried the baron, with fierce looks and wild voice. "It would at least render the weight of my misfortunes more tolerable, were the tribunal of the Bronze Statue annihilated; for then would my fated daughter be spared the necessity of abandoning her own country to take the veil in a foreign clime—and she would seek the seclusion of that cloister in which her aunts, Baron Georgey's daughters, now dwell."

'"Tranquillize yourself, my son," said Father Heracles, with a tone and

look of mysterious significancy; "for I think that I can promise you the gratification of your wishes respecting the destruction of that secret tribunal."

'"Oh! if this were possible!" exclaimed the Baron of Ildegardo, clasping his hands in the agony of suspense, and surveying the holy man with looks of earnest inquiry. "But pray explain yourself, my good old friend, and tell me the meaning of the words you have just uttered."

'"Yes, the time is now come for explanation," said Father Heracles.—"Know, then, that my recent journey to Prague was undertaken on your account, and with a view to procure the active interference of the king in extirpating a tribunal which exists in defiance alike of the laws of God and man, and which exercises a despotism so thoroughly independent of the throne. His majesty received me with kindness, and listened to me with attention, while I explained to him as much as I dared respecting the odious institution, without actually compromising your lordship's name, or alluding to the awful compact which you yourself had made on behalf of your first-born child. But I told his majesty enough to awaken his indignation; and when I assured him that I was acquainted with a person who had actually been conducted into the subterraneans where the tribunal's engines of punishment were erected, he became fearfully excited, and vowed the destruction of the illegal association. He then asked me where the subterraneans which I had mentioned were situated, and who was the chief the tribunal. To the first question I was unable to give an answer, but to the second I hesitated not to reply. The monarch's sagacity immediately suggested that the response to his latter query furnished the key to the solution of the former; and he at once came to the conclusion that since the Baron of Altendorf is the supreme head of the tribunal, the engines of punishment are most probably contained in the subterraneans of Altendorf Castle."

'"Yes, that is the opinion which I have all along entertained," said the Baron of Ildegardo; "for there is little doubt that it was to Altendorf Castle I was conducted on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when all the power and ferocious vengeance of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue were revealed to me. But pray continue your narrative, holy father, and tell me what course his majesty determined to adopt."

'"The king bade me return to this province and seek to interest two or three powerful chiefs to form a league against the Baron of Altendorf," continued Father Heracles; "and when this preliminary step should have been accomplished, his majesty promised that he would not only issue to the League of Chiefs his royal commission to act in his name, accompanied by a warrant for the capture of the Lord of Altendorf, but that he would likewise despatch a contingent of five thousand men to strengthen the forces of the said league."

'"O, Heracles!" exclaimed Ildegardo, overjoyed by this intelligence; "wherefore did you keep all these things secret from me until now?"

'"Because, my dear lord," answered the reverend man, "I did not wish to kindle the flames of feudal strife at a period when the Lady Emilia was in the delicate situation of one about to become a mother; and, moreover, I thought it prudent to await the issue and be guided by circumstances. For I reasoned within myself that the expected child might be born alive, or might die soon after its birth; and, looking still farther into the contingencies of the future, I did not forget that there was the possibility of her ladyship having no more children. In either of these cases I should have held my peace relative to the object of my journey to Prague; for it would have been in no wise consonant with my purpose to plunge your lordship into a civil discord without an important object in view."

'"And now that object *is* in view," exclaimed Ildegardo, "and Baron Georgey will league with me against the Lord of Altendorf. This much I can answer for; and therefore, worthy Heracles, thou must depart at once for Prague, throw thyself at the king's feet, and demand the fulfilment of his promises."

'"To-morrow will I set out upon my journey," said the reverend father; "and during my absence your lordship will have to make rapid but secret preparations for the feudal war. Your own forces combined with those of Baron Georgey, and aided by the contingent which his majesty has undertaken to send, will prove irresistible; and a grand blow can be struck by the storming of Altendorf Castle, before the

proud lord of that stronghold shall have even suspected your hostile intentions. The head-quarters of the dreaded tribunal thus falling into your power, the votaries of that association will be stricken with terror, and the rewards which I shall induce the king to offer for their betrayal and deliverance into the hands of justice, will spread confusion amongst them and set treachery to work. The result will be the destruction of this terrible fraternity; and your daughter will be spared the painful necessity of flying her country for ever when she becomes of an age to take the veil."

'"Father Heracles," said Ildegardo, embracing the holy man, "you have demonstrated towards me a friendship which I can never repay. My eternal gratitude is, however, yours—aye, and the gratitude of my beloved Emilia."

'"God grant that all our plans may succeed," said Father Heracles. "I shall now retire to my own chamber to prepare for the morrow's journey, and to implore the protection of heaven on behalf of the innocent babe which has just been born."

'But scarcely had the priest withdrawn by a private means of egress at the extremity of the apartment, when the door at the opposite end opened with a sudden violence, and the Baron of Altendorf appeared upon the threshold. The Lord of Ildegardo turned pale and trembled; for it instantaneously struck him that the dreaded chieftain might have overheard the conversation between himself and Father Heracles; and this suspicion was strengthened when he beheld the gloom that sate like a dark cloud upon the Baron of Altendorf's countenance, and through which the fierce eyes darted vivid lightnings.

'"My visit to your lordship's castle this day has been most opportune," said the terrible chief of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue, at length breaking silence as he advanced close up to the Baron of Ildegardo; "yes, as opportune as was my last visit five months ago," he added in a tone of significant irony.

'"Ah! then you have been playing the eaves-dropper, my lord?" exclaimed my noble master, his indignation suddenly triumphing over his terrors; and he laid his hand upon his sword.

'"Stay!—attempt not violence!" said the Baron of Altendorf; "remember that your young wife lies in a neighboring chamber, and that the clash of weapons would alarm her. But if you would repeat your taunt relative to the eaves-dropping which I may have practised, your lordship would do well to pause and reflect whether *you* have meditated any blacker treachery towards me. Nay—interrupt me not for a few moments," continued the baron, as Ildegardo made an impatient gesture; "but hear me out. Five months have elapsed since I conducted you into the subterraneans where the tribunal of the Bronze Statue punish those who offend against its laws; and on that memorable night I revealed to you the secret of the appalling punishments so inflicted. On the following day I came to your castle to ascertain the effect which that scene had produced upon your mind in calmer moments; and, behold! on reaching the door of the apartment where you were engaged in conference with the baroness and a certain priest, mine ears caught words which made me pause and listen. Then I learnt all the fine projects which that dotard Heracles propounded as the means of rescuing your first-born from the service of the Bronze Statue; and enraged at the readiness with which your lordship assented to the treachery, I closed with violence the door which I had opened with gentleness. Five months have passed since those incidents; and my spies, ever on the alert, announced to me at an early hour this morning that the Lady Emilia was about to become a mother. Again, therefore, do I visit your lordship's castle to remind you of the compact so solemnly formed with me three years and five months ago—and again do I catch words, the instant that I reach the door of your apartment, which transfix me there and compel me to play the part of what you denominate an eaves-dropper. And now when I ask your lordship to reflect upon all that has just taken place between Father Heracles and yourself, I should be well pleased to learn which you consider the more reprehensible—*your* treacherous intentions towards the man who saved your dwelling from sack and storm, or *my* eaves-dropping?"

'Covered with shame and confusion, and keenly appreciating all the truth and justice of the Baron of Altendorf's cutting observations, Lord Ildegardo could not give utterance to a word in reply; but he stood with downcast eyes before that dreaded chief, like a child

conscious of a fault in the presence of his tutor.

'"And now, my lord," continued the Baron of Altendorf in a tone of stern remonstrance and haughty defiance; "let me assure you that as much as I despise the machinations concocted by the doting old priest, do I hate and abhor both him for counselling the treachery and yourself for becoming so ready an accomplice. As for the king's promises, they are to be valued at the price of the chaff which the wind disperses. Amongst his very councillors and intimate advisers there are votaries and adherents of the Bronze Statue, though his majesty suspects it not; and *they* will permit no royal commission to issue to any league of chiefs—no warrant to be signed for the apprehension of the Baron of Altendorf—and no five thousand men to march and join the vassals of Barons Ildegardo and Georgey."

'These words, uttered with the strong emphasis and lofty tone of one who was fully confident of the truth of what he was advancing, not only struck dismay to the heart of my young master, but likewise made him aware that the Baron of Altendorf could not have lost a single syllable of all that had passed between him and Father Heracles. He therefore saw that open enmity, indignation, and menace were utterly useless; and, stricken down as it were into the very dust, he had recourse to entreaty and prayer.

'"Oh! my lord," he exclaimed, in a tone of anguish, "I confess that my conduct has been treacherous and ungrateful to a degree; but you will make allowances for a father anxious to rescue his first-born from the consequences of a fatal vow, recorded in a moment of despair? Oh! spare my child—release me from the hideous compact—and I will yield unto you the fairest portion of my estate; I will even become your vassal, and do you feudal service whenever I may be called upon."

'"Vain are your beseechings, my lord—vain are your proposals," said the Baron of Altendorf, in a voice of cold derision; "for although I am the chief of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue, I am unable to change its laws or deviate from its principles—and those admit not of any compromise. Besides, it is of the utmost importance to our association to obtain the adhesion of high-born ladies and noble damsels. For if they be beautiful and rich, brave warriors and proud peers court them in marriage; and they induce their husbands to follow their example and become members of the secret fraternity. Thus our institution secures the support of powerful adherents, and our influence is extended in all quarters of the kingdom. Think you, then, that I will consent to resign my claim to the services of the noble daughter of the Baron of Ildegardo, whenever she shall reach the age at which she may be tutored to accept her vocation, and enter upon the fulfilment of her destiny?'

'"O God! is this all true? or am I dreaming?" exclaimed Ildegardo, staggering to a seat, and pressing his hands forcibly against his throbbing brows.

'"Ah! what? do you again imagine that you are the prey to an hallucination?" cried the Baron of Altendorf, with a mocking laugh. "Gaze upon your wrist, my lord, and see if there be no sign *there!* But within an hour you will receive another, and still more terrible proof, of the reality of all that has hitherto occurred and is still taking place in respect to your compact with the Bronze Statue; and I warn you that when you behold the spectacle furnishing this additional testimony of which I speak—I warn you, I say, not to breathe my name in connection therewith; no, nor even venture so far as to drop the slightest hint that your recognise the vengeance of the secret tribunal in the deed. For if you disobey me in this respect, I swear by all the saints in heaven and by all the fiends in hell, that you shall be torn from your couch in the dead of night, hurried away to those subterraneans which you have already once visited, and consigned to the tender mercies of the Virgin's Kiss!"

'"O horror!" murmured the wretched Ildegardo, falling forward with his face upon the floor, for too well did he comprehend the appalling significancy of this tremendous threat. For several minutes did he remain thus crushed and overwhelmed with mingled anguish, horror, and despair; and when, recovering somewhat of his presence of mind, he slowly raised himself up again, he found that he was alone. The Baron of Altendorf was gone; but on this occasion Ildegardo experienced neither the curiosity nor the energy sufficient to make inquiries how he had gained admittance, nor in what manner he had departed.

'For nearly an hour did the unhappy young noble remain in that apartment

brooding over his misfortunes; and at last he resolved to hasten and consult Fathur Heracles.

'To the reverend priest's chamber did he accordingly repair; and receiving no answer when he knocked, he opened the door. Almighty God!—what a spectacle met his view! *There*—upon the floor of that room—lay the corpse of Heracles—the murdered, mutilated, disfigured corpse of the baron's best friend! Talk of brains' reeling, sensations becoming maddening, anguish rending the heart in twain, and nerves and fibres wrung to a degree of excruciating tension; but all these figures of speech will not convey an adequate idea of the transcendent misery which now seized upon the baron, as vultures fasten on their prey. All the pains of hell shot through his frame—physical pains of goading poignancy which made him writhe like a stricken snake, and which received their impulse from the torture that pervaded his whole moral being. For, to his memory rushed the mysterious warning which the Baron of Altendorf had given him touching a new and terrible proof of the reality and the power of the secret tribunal; and Ildegardo, therefore, beheld in the murdered priest at his feet, an unfortunate victim to the ferocious vengeance of the Bronze Statue!

'Ferocious indeed! for never was murder more barbarian in its nature,—more savage in its details! Although the deep gaping wound which a poinard had inflicted in the neck, must have caused instantaneous death, yet had the corpse been hacked and hewed as if a fiendish delight had revelled in the bloody work. Thus did it become evident—appallingly evident to the Baron of Ildegardo, that not only would the votaries of the Bronze Statue invade the privacy of the dwelling and penetrate into the interior of the well-guarded stronghold to accomplish their vindictive purposes, but that the punishments which they inflicted were signalised with an atrocity only too well calculated to strike terror into even the very strongest minds.'

CHAPTER LXXV.

CONTINUATION OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'Many minutes must have elapsed ere the Baron of Ildegardo could so far recover himself as to fix his attention upon the awful embarrassment in which he was now placed. What should he do? how was he to act? His first impulse, on regaining the guidance of his bewildered ideas, was to rush forth—summon his household—proclaim the diabolical deed—denounce the Baron of Altendorf or his servitors as the assassins, and call upon his vassals to fly to arms and avenge the massacre of the venerable old priest. But then came the remembrance of that hideous threat which the baron had uttered, and the dread significancy of which had made Ildegardo fall forward beneath the weight of an overwhelming horror,—and this recollection which once more caused the blood to curdle in his veins, was instantaneously followed by the thought that Emilia was not in a condition to endure the slightest alarm.—Moreover, to denounce the Baron of Altendorf would be to place *himself* under the necessity of avowing all the details of this fatal compact whereby his first-born was doomed to the service of the Bronze Statue, for without such full and complete explanation the world would naturally ask what inducement or motive the powerful Lord of Altendorf could possibly have in taking the life of a harmless and good old man. If, therefore, Ildegardo were to proclaim the murder and withhold the explanation alluded to, suspicion would instantaneously fall upon himself; and not only would all Bohemia execrate him as a savage assassin, but his own vassals would take up arms against him to avenge the cruel immolation of a pious old man whom everybody revered, esteemed, and loved.

'Having thus communed with himself, the wretched Ildegardo came to the conclusion that it was imperiously necessary to conceal the horrid catastrophe, and invent some feasible tale to account for the disappearance of the priest. Locking the door of the chamber, therefore, and securing the key about his person, the baron returned to his own apartment; and so soon as he had sufficiently composed his countenance and stifled his feelings to enable him to appear in his wife's presence, he hastened thither to behold his new-

born child. Then if an expression of anguish passed over his countenance, Emilia was not surprised; for she knew that he must feel acutely the inauspicious circumstances of the innocent babe's entrance into this life—and there was consequently no reason to make her suspect the occurrence of any greater misfortune. Her husband's visit to her chamber was necessarily short, on account of her delicate condition; and it was an indescribable relief to his harrowed mind when he could withdraw to the solitude of his own apartment, and give free vent to that anguish which it was maddening torture to conceal.

'Hours passed—and when midnight came and all was still throughout Ildegardo Castle, the baron proceeded to the chamber of the murdered priest. Thrusting the mangled remains into a sack, he bore the grisly load down a private staircase, and passed with all possible speed into the garden. His purpose was to bury the corpse in some secluded nook within the grounds; but the nervousness arising from the dread of interruption and discovery rendered him incapable of hollowing the grave; and once more shouldering the burthen, he hastened to the bank of the river with the intention of consigning the corpse to the tranquil depths that lay beneath its moonlit bosom. But at the very moment when, having put several large stones into the sack, he was about to roll it into the Moldau, a man burst forth from the shade of the tree overhanging the spot. The baron threw down his burthen and turned to fly precipitately; but the intruder caught him roughly by the arm, and Ildegardo, whirled round, as it were, by the force and suddenness of the proceeding, found himself face to face with Korali, the unprincipled intendant whom he had banished from his estates immediately after the defeat of Baron Manfredo.

'"Ah! my late noble master!" ejaculated Korali, the recognition being mutual; "this is indeed a piece of good fortune——"

'"What mean you?" demanded the baron, shaking him abruptly off; "and wherefore did you thus lay a hand upon me?"

'"My lord, be not angry with me,' said Korali; "for at the instant I knew not who you were. But perceiving something strange and suspicious in your conduct, I was resolved to ascertain who it was that came to throw a heavy sack into the Moldau at the dead of night."

'"And now that thine impertinent curiosity is gratified," returned the baron, "thou wilt do well to take thy departure promptly."

'"Not so, my lord," said Korali; "for as accident has thus thrown us together, we will not separate so easily. In a word, I am a man rendered desperate by misfortunes; houseless, moneyless, foodless, and in rags; whatever I do must improve my condition, for nothing can possibly make it worse."

'"If you require gold, my purse is at your service," said Ildegardo: "but on the condition that you take your departure this instant."

'"Your lordship's gold will keep me for a few weeks, or perhaps a few months." observed Korali; 'and when it is all expended, I shall be in as woful a condition as ever. No, I will not accept the compromise."

'"Compromise!" ejaculated the Baron of Ildegardo, sternly; "this insolence to me! But I warn you not to provoke me farther, or my poinard shall drink your heart's blood."

'"Pauper as I am, a dagger yet remains in my possession," answered Korali, with cool determination; "and if you draw your's, it will be a struggle to the death!"

'"Then what do you require of me, villain?" exclaimed the Baron of Ildegardo, scarcely able to subdue his wrath. Speak, and detain me not!"

'"Give me a patient hearing, my lord," interrupted Korali; "and I shall not occupy your attention many minutes. Know, then, that I sought the vicinage of your castle for the purpose of presenting myself to your lordship to-morrow morning, and imploring your pardon for the past and your countenance for the future. I should have besought you to receive me again into your service, even though it were to fill the most menial office in your household. But since I have had the good fortune thus to meet you, and under such circumstance——"

'"Explain yourself!" cried the baron, abruptly.

'"I mean, my lord," returned Korali, nothing daunted, "that I find your lordship upon the bank of the river, at midnight, and about to hurl into the silent waters a sack containing *something* which fell ere now from your shoulders with a dull, dead, heavy sound——"

'"Enough! enough!" ejaculated Ildegardo. "Here, take my purse—depart—and when that gold is spent, return to me and I will give you more."

'"My lord, you cannot thus shake me off," said Korali. "The murder which you have doubtless committed, and the secret of which you came forth to bury beneath the shining bosom of the Moldau——"

'"O horror!" cried the wretched baron, shuddering from head to foot. "Wretch—villain—who dare to level such an accusation against me?"

'"Thou canst not deny *this* is a corpse, my lord," exclaimed Korali, kicking the sack with his foot; "and even if *your's* were not the hand which dealt the death-blow, every circumstance tells marvellously against you. Listen, then, to the demand which I make, for I am now in a position to dictate my own terms. Yes, you may start—you may lay your hand upon your poinard: but you cannot intimidate *me*. Have I not already told you that I am a desperate man? Well, if your lordship will have peace, then peace it shall be; but if you say war, then a war to the death shall it prove."

'"No, let there be peace between us, Korali," said Ildegardo, finding himself completely in the power of the ruffian."

'"Peace it shall be," he responded. "And now listen to my terms. The adventure of the sack containing the corpse will remaic hushed up in my breast; and you need never tremble lest my tongue should blab. But, on the other hand, you must restore me to my old situation of intendant and chief steward of your castle and estates; and I promise to administer your lordship's affairs wisely, prudently, and honestly."

'"Ask me anything but *this*, Korali," exclaimed Ildegardo; "for my wife, my friends, my tenants, and my vassals will regarde me as a madman, if I dismiss the faithful Bernard and restore you to the stewardship."

'"Your lordship's wife, friends, tenants, and vassals will think far worse of you," responded Korali, "if it be proclaimed that the Baron of Ildegardo is a midnight assassin!"

'"Thou dar'st not accuse me thus, minion!" exclaimed my noble master, goaded to desperation.

'"I need only appeal to all the circumstances of the case," was the insolent rejoinder; "and here is a witness whose evidence is undeniable," he added, pointing significantly towards the corpse enveloped in the sack.

'"It is my destiny which thus irresistibly hurries me on from misfortune to misfortune," murmured the baron. "Here, take my signet-ring as a pledge that I will yield to thy demands," he added aloud, as he tendered the jewel to the crafty Korali. "To-morrow you will seek my presence in the castle, as if there were no previous understanding between us; you will throw yourself at my feet—you will implore my pardon—and, appearing to be moved by your entreaties, I shall forgive you. A few days must then elapse, and so soon as the excitement produced by your return shall have subsided, I will restore you to your ancient office. Let this be the understanding between us: and now leave me."

'Korali was satisfied with the arrangement and hastened away. The Baron of Ildegardo then consigned the murdered priest to the waters of the Moldau; and, returning to the castle, he spent several hours in effacing with his own hands the bloody traces of the tragedy from the floor of the chamber where it had taken place. The first beams of dawn were already glinting from the orient heaven as he sought his couch, where his sleep could not have been tranquil or refreshing.

'The arrangement made with Korali was carried into effect; and the friends, vassals, and tenants of the Baron Ildegardo were struck with mingled astonishment and dismay, when they learnt that the faithless and long discarded steward had been again received into his lordship's favor. For myself, I made no comment, fearful lest my motives in interfering might be misunderstood and attributed to jealousy; nor did I murmur when, at the expiration of a few days, I was ordered to deliver the keys of the castle into the hands of my successful rival. But although thus superseded in my post, I received a private assurance from the baron that he entertained the highest esteem for me, and that he was impelled by circumstances which he could not control. A species of sinecure was likewise created for me in his lordship's household, so that I might not become subordinate to Korali nor lose the emoluments which I had been enjoying during my stewardship. Nevertheless, I was far from happy—not on my own account, because I can defy my bitterest enemies, if I have any, to accuse me of selfishness: but I

saw that my beloved master had some secret source of sorrow, although at that time I was very far from suspecting its dark and terrible nature.

'The period was, however, approaching, when the thunder-cloud which hung over his head was to explode with appalling violence, and terrify thousands with the shock.'

CHAPTER LXXVI.

CONCLUSION OF BERNARD'S HISTORY.

'THE proceeding of the Baron of Ildegardo with respect to Korali caused, as I have already stated, the deepest surprise and sorrow amongst all his friends and dependants; and the rejoicings which had been commenced to celebrate the birth of an heiress, and which should have lasted for some time, were abruptly broken off throughout the Ildegardo estates. In one of the villages the populace flew to arms and declared that they would not permit Korali to appear amongst them; but this obnoxious individual despatched a party of the baron's archers to suppress the tumult; and the soldiers, having been well bribed to do the work effectually, made a terrible example of the ringleaders, whom they massacred in a barbarous manner. Thus in a few short hours was the love which the vassals upon the estates had ever entertained for their noble master, suddenly turned into a bitter hatred; and the lips which had so lately invoked blessings on his head, now levelled the direst execrations against him. His friends deserted him; his venerable father-in-law, Baron Georgey, sent to remonstrate with him severely upon his proceedings; and the pages of the castle, headed by John Zitzka, repaired to his presence in a body, and demanded their dismissal. His lordship, however, succeeded in inducing those youths to remain with him, for he was afraid that if they quitted his service at that juncture and entered the household of other nobles, they would carry with them evil reports concerning the massacre in the village.

'Meantime the baron had forged a tale to account for the disappearance of Father Heracles, whom he alleged to have been called upon to undertake a sudden journey to Prague upon business of the utmost importance. To the Lady Emilia he added a representation to the effect that the holy priest had departed for the capital in order to obtain the assistance of the king in uprooting the tribunal of the Bronze Statue; but when several weeks elapsed and no tidings came from the venerable ecclesiastic, the baron pretended to have received intelligence of his death. Every one was grieved at this announcement, for Father Heracles was universally loved; and the Lady Emilia was as much distressed as if it were some very near and dear relative whom she had thus lost. Respecting Korali, she was not sufficiently well acquainted with the details of his former conduct and the general aversion in which he was held, to entertain any strong feeling relative to his re-appointment; and her husband was careful in preventing any unpleasant reports or commems upon the subject from reaching her ears.—Besides, she was too much accustomed to view the baron's actions with a favorable eye, to have her suspicions easily roused concerning them; and her almost undivided attention was now given to the innocent babe that claimed her maternal care. Upon this child she bestowed the name of *Gloria*, not only because of the ante-natal dedication to heaven, but likewise on account of its style of loveliness which was even more remarkable than that of the beauteous baroness herself. For within a few weeks after its birth, it became apparent that the eyes of the child were endowed with a most extraordinary lustre—not shining with that unhealthy fever-light which is painful to behold, but beaming with a lustre alike pure and intense. Upon its little head, too, the golden hair soon appeared like a nascent glory; while the exquisite fairness of the complexion, blending the chastity of the lily with the delicate pinkness of the rose-bud, enhanced the seraphic air of radiancy which characterised the infant Gloria almost from the very instant of her birth.

'Time wore on, three years elapsed, and the child became a perfect prodigy of infantile loveliness. Nothing could be more winning than its ways—nothing more musical than its innocent prattle. And, oh! how tenderly, how fondly, how anxiously did the doating mother watch the development of her Gloria's charms; and how bitterly, bitterly did the fathes rue the day when he foredoomed to a cloister that dearly-

beloved daughter whose childhood gave promise of so magnificent a womanhood. Often, too, did he brood upon the negociations which the murdered Heracles had opened with the king in reference to the extirpation of the tremendous tribunal which seemed like an evil genius governing the destiny of the Ildegardo family; and the deeper he pondered upon these things, the more determined did he become to strike a grand blow at that secret jurisdiction which ever haunted him, even in the broad glare of noon, like a hideous night-mare. These thoughts he frequently communicated to his wife; and every time he urged them upon her consideration, her repugnance to the desperate undertaking grew more and more feeble. For although Gloria was irrevocably destined to take the veil, yet it would have been an unutterable relief and a beatific consolation to the bruised spirit of the adoring mother to know that when the proper time should come her daughter might seek the seclusion of that convent where Emilia's sisters were already established, instead of being compelled to flee her native land in order to escape the claims of the votaries of the Bronze Statue. Such were the mother's reflections; but those of the father were of a bolder nature. For when he contemplated his little girl already so transcendently lovely, and looked forward to the time when these nascent charms would develop themselves into a glorious womanhood, he thought that if he could only save her from the hideous service of the Bronze Statue by successfully accomplishing the ruin of that awful institution, he would find some priest to grant him absolution from that vow which had dedicated her to a cloister. Then how elate would be his heart and how proud his feelings when he could behold his daughter the centre of admiring guests—the brightest star amidst a galaxy of high-born beauties—and the object of courtship on the part not only of Bohemia's mightiest nobles but likewise of Europe's princes, all contending for the honor and happiness of her hand!

'In such day-dreams as these did the Baron of Ildegardo indulge; and, at length, when Gloria was three years' old, he made up his mind to unbosom himself to his father-in-law, Baron Georgey, and induce the venerable peer to join him in a crusade against the Baron of Altendorf. But at this period an occurrence took place which gave a new aspect to the position of affairs.

'Early one morning as some fishermen were pursuing their avocations on the banks of the Moldau, they drew up in their nets a heavy object which proved to be a sack containing something the mere touch of which excited horrible suspicions in their mind. Nor were these presentient apprehensions unfounded: upon examining the sack, it was found to contain a decomposing corpse. The apparel, though rotting around the remains which it enfolded, was nevertheless easily recognised as having been an ecclesiastical garb; and around the waist of the body was a string of beads with the aross appended—thus leaving no doubt as to the profession of the deceased.

Nor was the corpse so thoroughly disfigured as to reduce it to utter shapelessness; and it was therefore ascertained that the individual must have been an old man and that he had been cruelly and brutally murdered. While the fishermen were thus engaged in examining the corpse, one of the dependants of the Castle passed by the spot; and, his attention being called to the shocking discovery just made, he speedily recognized the beads and cross as having belonged to Father Heracles!

'The remains were now borne to the adjacent village; and the indignation of the inhabitants was excited to a frenzied pitch. They all remembered in a moment that it was the Baron of Ildegardo himself who propagated the story of the reverend father's death in Prague—they recalled to mind the fact that his lordship had pretended to have received letters from the capital at the time announcing the priest's demise—and they therefore naturally came to the conclusion that he who had thus spread false tidings to explain the holy man's disappearance, must have been the murderer! The news of the discovery of the corpse spread like wildfire throughout the estates, aye, even to the domains of Georgey and Manfredo;—and the peasantry, arming themselves with scythes and reaping-hooks, congregated in formidable numbers with the openly avowed intention of avenging the death of the old pastor who had been so universally beloved. The incident was seized upon as an opportunity for raising a death-cry against the hated Korali; and when some one endowed with a memory more tenacious than the rest, observed that the restoration of

the unpopular steward to office had followed close upon the sudden disappearance and alleged journey of Father Heracles, the multitudes snatched at the circumstance as a damning proof that Korali had been an aider and abettor with his master in the murder.—Then arose the furious cry of "To the Castle!" and on pressed the yelling, howling, terrible peasantry, carrying the corpse in their midst, and with their ghastly weapons gleaming in the sunlight. The Baron of Ildegardo and the Lady Emilia were walking in the garden at the time, unsuspicious of the evil that was brewing, and watching the lovely Gloria as with butterfly-playfulness she was disporting amidst the flowers fragrant as her own breath, radiant as her own beauty, and pure as her own infantile thoughts: when suddenly the clamor of the approaching multitude broke upon the tranquillity of the scene. I was the first of all the dependants to rush into the garden and acquaint my lord and lady with the fact that the peasantry were advancing with a hostile intent, though on what ground I could not conjecture. The Lady Emilia, not for an instant imagining that any danger threatened her husband, at once declared that she was ready to go forth with him and meet the insurgents. Taking, therefore, her husband's arm and leading little Gloria on the other side, the Baroness summoned all her energy to her aid; and followed by myself and other dependants, the noble couple and their child passed out of the postern and appeared in the presence of the armed crowd.

'At first there was a murmur of applause when the peasantry caught sight of the young mother and her daughter, both so radiantly beautiful; but in another instant a terrific cry of vengeance arose, and the sack was emptied of its hideous contents at the feet of the Baron! A wild shriek of terror burst from the lips of Emilia, although she knew not whose remains were thus flung forth to her view; and the little Gloria pressed more closely to her side, raising up her innocent countenance with an air of earnest inquiry towards the horror-stricken features of her mother. As for the Baron—*he* stood transfixed with a mute consternation which lasted for nearly a minute: then throwing up his arms in a paroxysm of indescribable agony, he exclaimed, "It is the corpse of Heracles!—the river has given up its dead!"

'"O God! protect us!" shrieked the wretched Emilia;—then, suddenly turning towards her husband, she exclaimed in broken accents. "But no—it cannot be—you did not do it—that good old man ——Oh! no—no—it isimpossible!'

'"Yes—it is impossble!' I repeated, rushing forward and waving my hand to impose silence upon the multitude, "Hear me, my friends—and whatever be your suspicions, I implore you not to judge hastily!"

"'We will have vengence upon the murderers of Heracles!" was the terrific shout that rose in deafening peal from the incensed peasantry. "The Baron of Ildegardo and his man Korali must answer for this!"

'"Speak to them, my lord—speak to them, I conjure you!" said I to the Baron. "Tell them that *you* at least are innocent——"

"'Yes—I am innocent—I take God to witness that I am innocent!" cried Ildegardo, who in the meantime had raised his unconscious wife in his arms.

'"Innocent! Oh — thank heaven that you are innocent!" she exclaimed, coming to life once more just at the very instant that those words fell from her husband's lips;—and suddenly regaining all her wonted energy, the Baroness was about to implore the leaders of the multitude to give the Baron a hearing, when forth from the Castle rushed Korali at the head of the archers, all armed to the teeth.

'A dreadful scene of confusion then followed: for a conflict instantaneously commenced between the peasants and the soldiers. With the greatest difficulty did I succeed in getting the Lady Emilia and Gloria away from the terrific scene; though if I were now asked to explain how I managed thus to rescue them from the turmoil that opened with such fury, I could not give the details of the incident. All was confusion, horror, and dismay; and my thoughts were a whirlwind until I found myself at a distance from the scene of strife, with the Lady Emilia hanging upon my arm, and the little Gloria clinging to my hand. We halted beneath the shade of a grove; and then the baroness wildly demanded of me, for the hundredth time, whether her husband was following. He was no where to be seen; and, in her frenzied grief, she vowed that she would return and seek him, or else perish by his side. But I placed the weeping Gloria in her arms, and, covering the child with kisses, she

exclaimed, "I understand you, Bernard! Whatever may have happened elsewhere, it is my duty to live for the sake of this innocent being! Go, then, my faithful friend—go and learn the issue of the contest, and here will I await your return.'

'I accordingly retraced my way towards the castle; but I had not proceeded far, when I observed two horsemen approaching me at a rapid pace. They were evidently flying from the scene of the conflict, and in a few moments I recognised the Baron of Ildegardo and John Zitzka. This latter had a bandage tied over one of his eyes, and the blood was trickling down his cheek; I therefore concluded that he had been wounded. They reined in their steeds the instant they came up to me; and in reply to the baron's hasty and anxious inquiries I reassured him a to the safety of his wife and child.

'"I will hasten to them," he exclaimed in a fever of excitement; then, turning towards Zitzka, he said, "How can I reward you, my excellent friend, for saving my life and rescuing me from the horde of bloodhounds, that sought to immolate me to their ferocity?"

'"My lord," answered Zitzka, in a cold and severe tone, "I seek no reward, even were you now able to afford any. I saw you hemmed in by your incensed vassals, and, obedient to my duty, I rushed among them at the peril of my own life to save yours. I succeeded—and, more than that, I enabled you to effect your escape. The result has, however, been the loss of one of my eyes; but this grieves me little, since I have placed you in safety, for I owed you a debt of gratitude, which is now acquitted. Thus far have I accompanied your lordship, to assure myself that you are beyond the reach of danger—but here we part. I thank you for the bounties I have received at your hand; but were you restored to your castle and estates to-morrow, I would not remain any longer in the service of one whose hands are stained with the blood of a worthy old man."

'The Baron of Ildegardo was thunderstruck by the words which thus came in cold and severe tones from the lips of the young man; and before he could recover from the mingled surprise and indignation which seized upon him—before, in fact, he could give utterance to a syllable in reply, John Zitzka put spurs to his steed and galloped away.

'"He believes me guilty, Bernard," at length exclaimed the baron; "he is blinded by circumstantial evidence as well as the rest. But I take God to witness that I am innocent of the good old priest's death, and when we have leisure to converse, I will unbosom all my misfortunes to thy friendly ears!—Meantime we must hasten to my father-in-law's abode, for the maddened peasantry are in possession of Ildegardo Castle."

'I now led the way to the spot where I had left the Lady Emilia and the innocent Gloria; and in a few minutes the baron clasped his wife and child in his arms. A hasty consulation was then held; and it was resolved that the baron should take his wife and child on his own horse direct to Lord Georgey's dwelling, while I followed on foot—for my master and mistress were afraid to permit me to return to Ildegardo Castle to see how affairs were progressing, lest I should be murdered by the peasantry on account of my known attachment to the baron and his family. But in order to reach Georgey Castle by the most direct road, it was necessary to traverse a portion of Baron Manfredo's estate; and, as some evil genius would have it, this nobleman was riding forth at the time with a party of his dependants. The news of the discovery of Father Heracles' body and the suspicions which attached themselves to the Baron of Ildegardo, had already become known, as I have previously stated, on Lord Manfredo's estates; and the instant that the fugitive family were thus encountered, journeying upon one horse and totally unattended, the extent of their misfortune was easily divined by the hostile baron.—Availing himself of this opportunity to gratify a long cherished vengeance.—Manfredo ordered his followers to make the Baron of Ildegardo their prisoner; and in spite of the entreaties of the almost heart-broken Emilia and the piteous lamentations of the interesting Gloria, my master was borne away captive to Manfredo Castle.

'Crushed by the weight of her misfortunes, the unhappy lady arrived with her child at Georgey Castle, where she experienced an affectionate reception at the hands of her kind old father. To him she confided all that she knew of the dreadful mysteries which had of late embittered her existence; but concerning the murder of Heracles she could of course give no explanation.—

She nevertheless declared her firm belief in her husband's innocence; and Baron Georgey either shared her conviction in this respect, or affected to do so in order to save her from any additional source of grief.

On arriving at Georgey Castle a few hours after my excellent mistress and her daughter, I was shocked to hear of the arrest of my master by Baron Manfredo: but as messengers had been already dispatched to treat with this nobleman for the liberation of his prisoner, I buoyed myself up with the hope that his lordship's release would be speedily accomplished. On the return of the messenger, however, it appeared that Baron Manfredo peremptorily refused to listen to any terms—alleging that the Lord of Illdegardo was accused of murdering a priest, and that he must be retained in custody until the King of Bohemia should have decided upon the proper course to be adopted in the matter.

'This decision crowned the sorrow of the already too deeply afflicted Baroness; and another consultation was held with her father, and to which I was summoned. Then was it that for the first time I learnt as much of all the mystery of this sad narrative as Emilia herself knew; and I was dispatched to Manfredo Castle to beg that her ladyship might be permitted to visit her husband. This boon was sternly refused by the vindictive peer; and all the favor I could obtain was an interview with my captive master. From his lips did I hear on this occasion all the particulars which filled up the gap in the history as related by the Baroness; namely, the last meeting between the Baron of Ildegardo and the Baron of Altendorf, the true details concerning the assassination of Father Heracles, and the adventure with Korali at midnight on the bank of the river. Oh! then how deeply did I sympathise with my unfortunate master who was the victim of such cruel circumstances;—how fearfully lucid became a thousand incidents to me so inexplicable before! But ere I took leave of him, the Baron addressed me in these terms:—"My good and faithful Bernard, we must allow the present untoward events to take their own course. Were we to proclaim all the tremendous truths of my unhappy history and denounce the Baron of Altendorf as the murderer of Heracles, the dread Tribunal of the Bronze Statue would assuredly demand and obtain me as a victim. Alas! I must endure the infamy of a hideous accusation until the time comes when heaven will cease to frown upon me and I once more become strong enough to face mine enemies. Then, Bernard—*then* will I proclaim all my wrongs—divulge the whole truth—and commence a war to the death against the Baron of Altendorf and Baron Manfredo! Return thou, therefore, to my wife; convey to her and Gloria my blessing;—and let Baron Georgey use his influence at the Court to procure an order for my liberation. Such a document bearing the King's sign-manual, Lord Manfredo will not dare disobey."

'I promised to fulfil all these instructions, and having taken leave of my master, returned to Georgey Castle.—There I related all that had passed; and both the Lady Emilia and her father were rejoiced to find that the Baron of Ildegardo was really innocent of the old priest's death. I should here observe that Manfredo was too powerful to render it prudent for Baron Georgey to engage in warfare with him on Lord Ildegardo's account—especially as the raging peasantry on the estates of the latter had sent to claim the protection and acknowledge the feudal seigniory of Manfredo. Accordingly, this nobleman sent a party of his own retainers to occupy Ildegardo Castle; and as Korali with the valorous archers still attempted resistance, he was taken and put to death.

"Baron Georgey lost no time in repairing in person to Prague, where he threw himself at the feet of the King and gave such a version of the whole affair that his Majesty ordered the Council of State to examine into it without delay. But Manfredo's agents were already at work to give to the transaction a complexion suitable to the interests of their master, whose object was to procure the condemnation of Ildegardo either to death or exile so that he might enjoy possession of the estates on which he had already seized. The investigation lasted nearly twelve months; and the result was favorable to the side represented by Baron Georgey, who accordingly returned home, after his long absence, with an order addressed to Baron Manfredo, commanding the immediate liberation of Lord Ildegardo. This mandate was obeyed; and my master was thus restored to his wife and daughter.

"But Baron Manfredo refused to

withdraw his troops from the Ildegardo Castle and estates, under pretence that no command to that effect was contained in the royal document. Baron Georgey was now irritated beyond all power of endurance; and he exclaimed, 'My dear son-in-law, the hour is at hand to punish this haughty usurper, or perish in the attempt. We will not waste time by again appealing to his Majesty and the Council: but we will take up arms to rescu your possessions from the despoiler.'—Vast and rapid preparations were accordingly made for the feudal war; and in a few weeks the whole of Baron Georgey's retainers were under arms. These were strengthened by a band of hired auxiliaries furnished by a powerful nobleman in an adjacent province; and Lord Ildegardo took the command of all the forces thus assembled. The moment that his hostile intentions became known, the peasantry on his estates, being determined not to return to their duty towards him, occupied the Castle; while Baron Manfredo on his side made vigorous preparations to resist a demonstration which, in consequence of the auxiliary band, assumed so formidable an aspect. The Baron of Ildegardo marched straight against the the occupants of his own Castle, which he attempted to carry by storm: but the peasantry defended it with a sort of frenzied rage, their courage being excited to madness by the contents of the well-stored cellars. Throughout an entire day and night did the conflict rage; and in the morning Manfredo made his appearance at the head of his vassals. A desperate battle was fought, the result of which was terribly disastrous to both sides; and while Manfredo was compelled on the one hand to retire to his own fortalice, my master was forced to abandon the attack upon Ildegardo Castle and return to his father-in-law's stronghold to recruit his losses. Some weeks elapsed ere the field was again taken; and then the overflow of the Moldau, which flooded all the low lands, forced the hostile parties to abandon the campaign for the rest of the winter.

"Meantime the peasantry, delighting in their comfortable quarters, remained in Ildegardo Castle, feasting and revelling, and neglecting the culture of their fields. In the Spring the feudal war was renewed; and until the close of Autumn did it last without any definite result. Manfredo kept Ildegardo so fully occupied that the peasantry were enabled to hold possession of the Castle belonging to the latter;—and thus was this disastrous war continued to the ruin of the pecuniary resources of all engaged in it, and the destruction of the fine estates in which it was carried on. Again, when the Spring-flowers peeped forth, were hostilities resumed;—and the Baron of Ildegardo was now enabled to direct his operations more vigorously than on any former occasion against the peasantry occupying his Castle. At length one night he obtained a footing on the inner rampart—and gallantly did his followers push on to carry the place by storm. But, behold! the very hour of Ildegardo's triumph was likewise that of his ruin: for the peasants, driven to desperation—maddened by drink—and dreading the worst at the hand of the master whom they had so long resisted, set fire to the spacious pile. From the summit of Georgey Castle did I view the appalling conflagration; and never—never can I forget the looks of despair which the unhappy Lady Emilia, who clung to my arm, fixed upon the awful spectacle—aye, doubly awful in the deep darkness of the night!

"Yes—The Castle was destroyed—the old Castle which had existed for centuries, became a prey to the unsparing flames; and in a few hours it was reduced to the condition in which it appears! Maddened at the sight, the Lord of Ildegardo commanded that no quarter should be given to the peasants; and they were massacred almost to a man as they attempted to fly from amidst the scene of grand but awful destruction which they themselves had consummated.

"The flames were raging still, feeding upon the corpses of the peasants,—and the sun was rising above the eastern hills,—when Baron Manfredo suddenly appeared at the head of his army; and a frightful combat now ensued between that force and Lord Ildegardo's troops. It was evident that Manfredo had waited until the latter were thoroughly worn out, in order to strike a decisive blow; and his calculations proved to be only too accurate. My noble master's warriors fought desperately; but they were overwhelmed on every point—and their route was complete. Broken-hearted did the Baron of Ildegardo return to Georgey Castle:—and taking at once to his bed, he never rallied again, but breathed his last in a few hours!

"The rapidity with which misfortunes now succeeded each other, and the crushing weight with which they

fell on the heads of the doomed, seem rather to belong to a romance of exciting interest than to an authentic record of stern realities. For scarcely were the remains of the Baron of Ildegardo laid in the tomb,—scarcely had the Lady Emilia and her hapless Gloria assumed the weeds of a widow and an orphan—when Manfredo arrived with his host to take vengeance upon Baron Georgey for the succour and support lent by the venerable old peer to his late son-in-law. The few vassals who had escaped alive from the conflict beneath the walls of Ildegardo Castle, made a desperate resistance: but all was in vain. The good old Baron, Emilia's father, was killed while fighting at the head of his retainers; and the sanguinary horde led on by Manfredo poured into the Castle. No tongue can describe the scene of eorror which followed: for the victors, intoxicated with success, committed the most unheard-of barbarities not only in respect to the prisoners whom they took, but likewise towards the hapless women;—and then, so soon as the work of slaughter, plunder, and violation was complete, they set fire to the building. Not content with perpetrating these horrors, they proceeded to the desecration of the convent where the Lady Emilia's sisters dwelt: but those noble recluses, driven to desperation by the dishonor which menaced them, and preferring death to such crowning ignominy, fired their cloistral abode and perished in the conflagration. As for the Lady Emilia, Manfredo protected *her* from the brutality of his soldiery, because her loveliness had captivated his heart, and he resolved to make her either his wife or his mistress: he accordingly removed her, together with her daughter Gloria, to his own Castle.

'Vainly did I implore permission to accompany the heart-broken lady into her captivity; the ruthless Manfredo spurned me from him, heaping the most opprobrious epithets upon my head, and bidding me think myself fortunate in escaping with my life. As a wanderer was I, therefore, cast forth upon the world; and towards the ruins of Ildegardo Castle did I bend my steps. The place, once so animated and full of busy life, was now desolate; and I sate down upon a stone to give free vent to the bitterness of my affliction. Fourteen years have elapsed since then; but the anguish of that hour remains as perfect to my recollection as if I had only undergone its influence yesterday, for those maddening memories are seared as with a red hot iron upon my brain! Then, as soon as I had somewhat recovered from that paroxysm of unutterable affliction, I looked around me—I rose—and, finding that the solemn silence was broken by no other footstep save my own, I wandered slowly amidst the ruins, pausing at each well-remembered spot and bathing it with floods of tears.

'I ascended to the summit of this Donjon—and in the far-off horizon I beheld the remnants of Georgey Castle as we see them now;—and I likewise dwelt long and lingering on the fortalice in the south-east where my beloved lady and her charming daughter were retained captives. It then struck me that I might experience a melancholy pleasure in contemplating every day that Castle which had now become her dwelling-place and her prison; and I accordingly resolved to fix my abode in yonder cell. For it had escaped the fire, as you perceive; and, as it was wont to be tenanted by the warder who had charge of the night-watch, it contained a few rough articles of furniture. From that period until now—an interval of fourteen years—have I made my habitation there!

'But I must make a speedy close to my long narrative. The Baron Manfredo was summoned to Prague to give an account to the King of his conduct towards two such powerful chieftains as the Barons Ildegardo and Georgey, as well as for the catastrophe which had involved the destruction of the convent; but he doubtless succeeded in giving such a complexion to the whole affair and was so well backed by influential friends at Court, that the matter was dropped so far as he was concerned.—The result of the tale which he told, and which proved his own safeguard by representing the Lords of Ildegardo and Georgey as two traitors to their Sovereign, nevertheless militated against his rapacious aims in one respect; for, instead of becoming invested with the estates of the two deceased peers as he had hoped, he had the mortification of seeing them confiscated for the benefit of the Crown. A royal commissioner shortly after arrived to take formal possession of them; and from this functionary did I receive permission to continue my residence in that lonely cell. I did not fail to represent to the commissioner that the Baroness Ildegardo and her

daughter were still living and were retained in captivity by Manfredo; but the Court official cut short my remarks, by observing that Ildegardo and Georgey estates were male fiefs, and that therefore, apart from the warrant of confiscation, they legally lapsed to the Crown in default of proper heirs to claim them.

'About a year after these occurrences a report reached my ears to the effect that a dispute had taken place between the Baron of Altendorf and Baron Manfredo; but upon what ground I did not learn. I could not, however, help thinking that it was in some way connected with the claims of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue upon the Lady Emilia's daughter Gloria, though whether this conjecture of mine were well founded, I have never been able to ascertain. Suffice it to say, that the Baron of Altendorf marched at the head of all his retainers against Manfredo Castle, which was defended against the besiegers with the utmost gallantry for twenty days. At the expiration of that period the Baron of Altendorf carried it by storm during the night; and, Manfredo being slain in the conflict, his vassals set fire to the building and perished in the ruins.

'Here my narrative ends! For never since that day have I received the slightest intelligence of the Baroness Emilia and her charming Gloria; and there is, alas! too much reason to believe that they both perished in the conflagration. It was well known in these districts that they were still retained captive in the castle at the time when the Lord of Altendorf marched against it,—well known likewise that the Lady Emilia had resisted all the overtures of Baron Manfredo to become his wife. The melancholy presumption, therefore, is that the ill-fated widow and helpless child of my master ended their lives in the midst of the tremendous funeral pyre which the maddened desperation of its defenders made of Manfredo Castle.'

CHAPTER LXXVII.

PERPLEXITY, SUSPICION, AND UNCERTAINTY.

The reader will remember that ere the venerable Bernard began his long but profoundly interesting narrative, Sir Ernest de Colmar's mind had already become a prey to strange suspicions, and the thoughts which arose in his brain relative to Satanais had caused a vague and unknown terror to creep over him. He had shuddered likewise with a presentiment that he was on the point of listening to strange revelations; and to his soul there came the wild impression, dread as a warning from the tomb, that the history he was about to hear would exercise an influence over his own destiny. But, even with these premonitions, he was as far from suspecting the tremendous truths that were so soon to burst upon his startled mind, as the individual who goes forth to contemplate the awful grandeur of the storm forsees that he himself is doomed to be struck down by the crashing thunderbolt.

But Bernard had not advanced far with his narrative before Sir Ernest de Colmar was struck with the remarkable similitude which it bore to the history related to him by Satanais in the gardens of the royal palace at Prague,—and this idea instantaneously furnished him as it were with a key to the farther reading of the mystery. The title of Ildegardo, surnamed '*The Thunderer*,' brought vividly to his mind that of Ildirim, '*The Lightning*;' then came the appellation of Korali, answering to that of Kara Ali in the narrative of Satanais; and surely Manfredo was Mansour; and the Baron Georgey of the one tale was the King of Georgia of the other!

This discovery, striking De Colmar's mind as it were blow upon blow, filled him with an awful consternation, for he instantaneously saw that Satanais had deceived him! But mastering his emotions with a superhuman effort, he continued to drink in with a breathless attention the words which flowed from Bernard's lips; and as incident after incident developed itself in the old man's narrative, the terrible conviction was carried to the warrior's mind, beyond all possibility of doubt or misapprehension, that Satanais had artfully but ingeniously paraphrased the true history to suit some hidden purposes of her own. Transplanting the scene of that history from the southern province of Bohemia to a far-off oriental clime—altering the European names of her heroes and heroines into an eastern nomenclature—elevating those personages to the rank of kings and princesses—converting stewards and intendants

into prime ministers—throwing into her tale a sufficiency of Moslem imagery to sustain the deception—adorning the architecture of her narrative with the richness of oriental sculpture,—bending some incidents to the plastic form suitable to her aims, suppressing others altogether, or inventing new ones—and assigning to Satan the part really and naturally played by the dreaded Chief of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue—Satanais had exhibited a consummate skill in the adaptation of a plain and simple chronicle of interesting facts to the mysterious and unaccountable objects which she doubtless sought to achieve by this tremendous duplicity.

'Thus, in her ornate and high-flown oriental legend, the Lady Emilia became the Princess Almeria; while the good old pastor Heracles figured as the Armenian priest Heraclius. But not a word in *her* narrative of John Zitzka—not a word of the lost son of Baron Georgey! And on the other hand, there was not a word regarding the birth of twin sisters in Bernard's history—not a syllable respecting such a being as Satanais herself!

Who, then, was Satanais? and how could she connect herself with the family of Ildegardo,—that Ildegardo the baron whom she had typified as Ildirim the king? Gloria, on the contrary, was a true character, no imaginary heroine, for Sir Ernest de Colmar had seen her, had known her, had become the object of her adoring love,—and had likewise been doomed to shudder at her crimes? But again and again recurred the question, 'Who, then, is Satanais?'

If she were the sister of Gloria, then the Lady Emilia must have either married a second husband or else have borne an illegitimate child after Lord Ildegardo's death? Or again, might she not have been in the way to become a mother when that nobleman died of a broken heart and she was conveyed a captive to Manfredo Castle? But in Bernard's history there was no mention of such an occurrence. Moreover, Gloria was six years old when that captivity took place; and if her mother had given birth to a second child, this younger sister of Gloria's would now be scarcely fourteen; and, therefore, it could not possibly be Satanais!

On the other hand, it was equally difficult to discard the theory that Gloria and Satanais must be thus closely related, for their wondrous resemblance to each other, setting aside the difference of their complexions and the color of their hair, seemed to proclaim that they were sisters. Their features were cast in exactly the same mould,—their eyes shone with the same supernal brilliancy. They were of the same height, their gait, their attitudes, their walk, their movements,—all were identical! Then there was the same golden melody of the voice, the same captivating powers of language, the same love of mystery, and the same devoted attachment to that mother whose memory they both seemed to cherish so fondly! Again and again, then, recurred the question,—'Who is Satanais?'

But now sprang up in De Colmar's mind another reflection scarcely less interesting in itself or less vitally important to him than all the other bewildering ideas which Bernard's narrative excited in its progress. For since the supernatural portion of the tale related by Satanais was now destroyed,—and since the parts assigned to Satan had really been performed by the Baron of Altendorf,—the question naturally suggested itself—"Who was the champion in sable armour that had conquered Sir Ernest de Colmar upon the heath?"

We will not however delay the regular course of our narrative in order to chronicle each reflection to which Bernard's tale gave rise in the Austrian warrior's soul: momentous indeed were all those thoughts, as they took their birth one after a nother during the development of the incidents which fell from the old man's lips. We must however observe that it was with no ordinary difficulty, but with an almost incredible amount of self-command, that Sir Ernest de Colmar so far subdued his feelings as to avoid interrupting Bernard with a multiplicity of queries during that narration;—and it likewise cost him no insignificant effort to restrain himself from bursting away from the side of that venerable man and seeking Satanais in the adjacent cell to demand an explanation of her conduct. But, beneath the excitement which Bernard's history engendered and sustained within his soul, there was an under-current of profound interest which made him an almost breathless listener;—and thus, while on the one hand he was urged by a powerful impulse to hasten to Satanais and demand the elucidation of all those mysteries which bewildered and tortured him, on the other hand he felt

and obeyed the necessity which prompted him not only to conceal his emotions from Bernard's eyes, but also to stay and hear him to the end.

The sun had set some time ere the old man ceased speaking;—and throughout the long history had he and De Colmar remained in the same spot on the summit of the Donjon. But so absorbed were both the narrator and the listener in the profound interest of the tale and of the reflections to which it gave birth, that they observed not when the orb of day threw its ruddy tints upon the western woods,—nor when it sank to rest below the horizon,—nor when the moon at its first appearance shed a faint silvery gleam upon the sombre landscape,—nor when, acquiring power as the darkness increased, the planet of the night advanced in slow and queenly majesty over the far-off forest. Thus did the obscurity deepen insensibly and unperceived around the old Donjon where De Colmar and Bernard stood; and thus also did the moonlight steal in the same unobserved manner upon the scene.

'Your narrative has touched me more profoundly than I can describe,' said Sir Ernest de Colmar when Bernard ceased speaking: 'and ere I pass a comment upon it, let me hasten to inform you that the Lady Gloria still lives!'

'The Lady Gloria lives!' cried the old man, with mingled amazement and joy. 'Oh! let me hasten to throw myself at her feet—to fold her in my arms—to gaze upon her at least once ere I die——."

'Compose your feelings, my worthy friend,' said De Colmar: 'for I am utterly unable to lead you to her. I know not where she is, nor whither she has gone. But I have seen her, more than once——."

'And is she beautiful—very beautiful?' inquired Bernard, weeping like a child. 'And is she happy?—for that she is virtuous and good, I feel convinced—at least if she has followed her excellent mother's example.'

'Yes—she is indeed beautiful, beautiful as an angel,' answered De Colmar: then, in order to evade the other question which the old man had put, he hastened to observe, 'Her mother has long been dead, at least I have reason to believe that such is the fact: but I scarcely imagine that the Baroness of Ildegardo perished, as you suppose, in Manfredo Castle. On all these subjects, however, we will converse to-morrow: and in the meantime you must answer me one or two questions. In the first place, then, tell me whether this narrative which you have just unfolded to my ears is generally known, with all its harrowing details, throughout these districts?'

'The outline of the history is of course well known,' responded Bernard: 'but all the circumstances relating to the Baron of Ildegardo's compact with the Baron of Altendorf and the true particulars respecting the murder of Heracles; in fine, all those portions of the tale which involve the mysteries and the terrors of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue, are known but to a few. For from my lips alone were they likely to be published; and it is only on rare occasions that I have been so communicative as in the present instance.'

'Then wherefore have you thus made a confidant of me?' inquired the Knight.

'Because,' answered the old man, without an instant's hesitation, 'there is something so generous, so frank, so noble-hearted in the expression of your countenance, that I feared not to trust you with those awful revealings.'

'I thank you, worthy old man, for the favorable opinion you have thus entertained of me,' said De Colmar, pressing Bernard's hand with friendly warmth. 'But tell me—had you ever any reason to suppose that the Lady Emilia could possibly have had another daughter besides Gloria?'

'Assuredly not!' exclaimed Bernard, in a tone expressive of his unfeigned surprise at the query. 'That is to say,' he added, 'the Baroness of Ildegardo was never married a second time to my knowledge: indeed, as I have already informed your excellency, methought the unhappy lady had perished in the conflagration at Manfredo Castle.'

'And you have never heard of any near relation, about the same age as Gloria, and closely resembling her?' said De Colmar, with feverish impatience—for he was all anxiety to seek an interview with Satanais.

'No, never,' was the old man's response to the knight's last question. 'But wherefore this strain of interrotory?'

'I will tell you to-morrow,' rejoined De Colmar.

At this moment the door of the cell where Satanais lay was opened, and the light of a lamp within streamed forth upon the roof of the Donjon. Im-

mediately afterwards Linda and Beatrice crossed the threshold, closing the door behind them; and Sir Ernest de Colmar, hastily quitting Bernard, approached the young maidens, who were evidently startled on perceiving that they were not alone on the summit of the Donjon.

'How fares it with your mistress now?' inquired De Colmar.

Reassured by recognising the voice—for they at first feared lest some strange intruders had visited the tower—Linda and Beatrice advanced to meet the knight; and, in reply to his question, the elder sister informed him that Satanais had just awakened from the refreshing slumber in which he had left her nearly three hours previously.

'And our beloved mistress has anxiously inquired after your excellency,' observed Beatrice. 'Indeed, on awakening from her sleep, her first thought was for you; and she sent us forth with the idea that you might possibly be somewhere in the vicinage of the Donjon.'

'Then you were about to seek me, fair maidens?' said De Colmar, inquiringly.

'We should have descended to the court-yard on the chance of finding your excellency,' answered Linda; 'for we thought it probable that you might not yet have retired to the chamber prepared for you—if indeed any such preparations have been made at all for your excellency's comfort. But our object was to relieve your excellency of the anxiety which you experienced on behalf of our mistress, and to convey the assurance that she experiences little inconvenience from the wound inflicted by the Carthusian priest.'

'It would afford me satisfaction to obtain a few minutes' interview with the Lady Satanais,' said De Colmar.

'I will hasten and impart your excellency's desire to my mistress,' returned Linda; and she immediately tripped lightly back to the cell.

In a couple of minutes she reappeared with a message to the effect that Satanais would be delighted to receive Sir Ernest de Colmar's proposed visit; and while Linda and Beatrice remained upon the roof of the Donjon to converse with old Bernard, the knight entered the rude turret-chamber occupied by the Daughter of Satan.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE DECEIVER AND THE DECEIVED.

The interior of the cell was lighted by a lamp; and on the outside of a humble pallet, the superb Satanais was reclining. She had not laid aside any portion of her apparel; but her long sable hair flowed in a glossy cloud over her shoulders, and on her arm was the bandage that old Bernard had originally fastened there, and which the hand-maidens had adjusted.

The moment that Sir Ernest de Colmar appeared upon the threshold, Satanais raised herself partially on the couch and threw an anxious glance of piercing scrutiny upon his countenance. That regard of fire—rapid and profound, and flung with a sort of affright—was meant to fathom the depths of his soul, as if she were well aware that a crisis in her destiny had arrived, the result of which depended upon the thoughts that were revolving in the mind of her lover.

Their looks met—*her's* fraught with that penetrating keenness of acute suspense and torturing anxiety—and *his* expressing a profound sorrow, mingled with a gentle upbraiding. Satanais felt that her worst fears were about to receive their confirmation; and, unable to stifle the sob which swelled in her throat, she continued to gaze upon the handsome features of the warrior with looks that rapidly changed to terror and dismay.

Closing the door, approaching the couch, and seating himself by the side of that humble pallet, Sir Ernest de Colmar took the hand of Satanais, and contemplating her for upwards of a minute in profound silence, he at length said,

'Do you feel yourself strong enough and sufficiently composed to converse with me upon matters of some importance?'

'Were I at the point of death, Ernest, I should implore you to relieve me from the terrible state of suspense into which your looks and manner have just plunged me,' answered the magnificent creature, her voice sounding tremulously clear as a golden bell, the melody of which vibrates upon the gale that half drowns it at the same time.

'Then you are aware, Satanais,' said the knight, the rich masculine sounds of his own voice being subdued into an intonation of melancholy pathos—'you

are aware that there are secrets which I may have discovered within the last few hours, and from the lips of an individual whom you have this day seen amongst the ruins of Ildegardo Castle?'

'I am aware that the venerable Bernard has a tale to tell,' replied Satanias, her bosom heaving convulsively and her voice almost lost in suffocating sobs:—'and I perceive by your words, your looks, and your manner, that he has not failed to breathe it to your ears. But tell me,' she exclaimed, in a sudden paroxysm of wild and almost delirious vehemence—'tell me whether I am to consider that everything is at an end between you and me?'

And, rising to a sitting posture upon the couch, she fixed on him a gaze so intense and so full of impassioned inquiry, that it seemed as if she were a criminal conscious that her life depended upon the reply of a judge to whom she was appealing.

'Satanias,' said the knight, in a low deep tone, 'you have put to me a question which I cannot immediately answer. And yet that answer should be found in your own conscience: for I am a man too profoundly wedded to principles of justice, to condemn any one without a fair and impartial hearing; and moreover, you know that I have entertained for you a love which will neither permit me to sacrifice my own happiness nor trifle with yours, unless the force of circumstances should prove invincible. Within the last three hours I have heard strange and wondrous things, a narrative which has engendered the cruellest doubts and the most poignant suspicions in my mind; and I fear, alas! I fear, that you cannot possibly afford a satisfactory explanation.'

'Then everything is indeed at an end between us!' exclaimed Satanais; and, falling back upon the couch, she covered her face with her hands.

But during the brief interval of a moment which elapsed between the utterance of those despairing words and this concealment of her countenance, De Colmar caught the thousand different expressions which swept, like the myriad shadows of a flight of birds over a sunny field, across the face that was almost at the same instant hidden from his view by the exquisitely modelled hands. And in that transitory moment he read all the anguished disappointment of a blighted love, all the misery attendant upon the wreck of the fondest hopes, all the indescribable grief of a blasted ambition, all the poignant woe, the burning shame, and the withering affliction of a heart baffled, crushed, and rent by the ruin of its brilliant visions and its exalted aspirations.

Then to the warrior's soul was carried the conviction that Satanais really loved him, fondly, truly, and unfeignedly loved him, as much for himself alone as for any knowledge which she might secretly possess of his power to place her in a proud position and on a lofty elevation.

He endeavored to speak, to give utterance to words of solace and reassurance: but his lips quivered vainly, his voice remained in his throat, with a stifling sensation, as if kept down and crushed by an irresistible weight; and although he longed, oh! he longed to snatch the houri to his breast and proclaim forgiveness for the past and love for evermore, yet a power superior to his own seemed to hold him enchained with a paralysing influence and place a seal upon his lips!

There was an interval of many minutes' silence in that turret chamber—broken only by the long and difficult breathing of Satanais, as she lay upon the couch with her face still covered by her hands. She did not sob, she did not moan, she did not give vent to murmuring lamentations: but, a prey to a sombre, blank, and numbing despair, she remained motionless in all save that lengthened and painful respiration, and the slow heaving and sinking of her bosom.

Upon the snowy white coverlid did her splendid form display itself in all the richness of its contours, in all its sweeping length of limb, in all the plentitude of its perfection, its voluptuousness, and its grace; and yet, whenever De Colmar was about to yield to the boundless pity and the ardent love which he experienced for that being of wondrous beauty, whenever he was on the point of stretching forth his arms and tearing her as it were from the cold tomb of despair to receive new life and awake to resuscitated happiness in the fostering warmth of his embrace—then, at that moment did some sudden idea seem to flame up in his mind, warning him of the danger attendant upon a proceeding so infatuated and so insane!

At length his tongue was loosened; and in a low tone, full of ineffable feelings, he said, 'Satanais, the decree has gone forth from your own lips, and

naught now remains for me but to bid you farewell—farewell for ever!'

'My God! and has it come to this?' she exclaimed, in a voice so altered, so hollow, so full of despair, that it made the knight shudder from head to foot, aye, and wrung tears from his eyes: then, withdrawing her hands from her face, the dark houri raised herself slowly until she supported her head upon one of her arms, her elbow resting on the pillow, and, bending upon De Colmar a look fraught with a woe as indescribable as it was unfeigned, she said, 'Yes, we must bid each other farewell for ever! There is now no alternative, and, since the first excess of despair is passed, I am already striving to nerve myself to meet my destiny with becoming fortitude. But one thing I am bound to mention in justice to myself: for, whatever misrepresentations I may have made to you, Ernest, whatever arts and wiles I may have practised in order to ensnare you in inextricable meshes, however great my duplicity has been, however extensive have been the ramifications of the deception which I have carried on, alike on my own account and under the influence of *another*—yet, solemnly and sacredly do I declare that from the very instant I first met you in the Taborite encampment, I have loved you with an ardor, an enthusiasm, and a worship such as never animated woman's heart before. Yes, we must separate, we must say farewell for ever! But I beseech, I implore you not to quit me in harshness and anger: I pray and entreat you, Ernest, to forgive me for all that has passed, and sometimes to devote a thought to me in future.—Never more will you hear of me, never more shall I cross your path. To some distant seclusion shall I retire; and there, in the deep solitude which can alone become compatible with an incurable woe, shall I ever ponder upon your image, ever pray for your success, your happiness, and your prosperity in this life! Spurn me not therefore from you, Ernest, throw me not away from you with loathing and contempt: but breathe one word, one single word, of kindness and pardon, so that I may bear that word with me into the solitude which I am about to seek, and treasure it up as the only gem left to me from the myriad jewels which formed the halo-coronet of that love wherewith you so lately crowned my happiness!'

'Yes, Satanais, I forgive you for the past, oh! most sincerely, most unfeignedly, and most unreservedly forgive you,' exclaimed De Colmar, seizing her hand and pressing it as warmly as he was first wont to clasp it: but almost instantaneously releasing it, as a sign that he was resolved to combat against any feeling of softness which might prompt a renewed self-abandonment and yielding relapse into the flood of that passion which had already hurried him on to the very brink of destruction,—he said, 'Whatever your motives in deceiving me may have been, I cannot forget that you have loved me; and, in separating from you, for ever, rest assured that you will be followed by my prayers, and by my friendship. But will you not vouchsafe some explanation of those mysterious incidents which have brought us to this lamentable crisis?'

'What is it that you require to know?' asked Satanais, hastily brushing away the tears that had started forth upon her long ebon lashes.

'The venerable Bernard has brought down his history to that point where he believed the Baroness Emilia and her daughter Gloria to have perished in the ruins of Manfredo Castle," said the knight.

'Yes, I can well understand how much Bernard was enabled to reveal, and where his history must have necessarily broken off,' remarked Satanais, in a profoundly musing tone.

'Then you can comprehend likewise how much remains for you to clear up and explain,' returned De Colmar. 'You perceive that I have avoided reproaches—that I have even forgiven you for the past, although my own happiness is well nigh wrecked, Satanais, by this fatal blow to my heart's fondest aspirations; and the only expiation you can now make,' added the knight, scarcely able to master his emotions, 'is to give me a full and frank explanation of all that is still so utterly incomprehensible to my mind.'

He paused for upwards of a minute, during which he wrestled with an almost superhuman energy against his own feelings; while Satanais vainly strove to check the tears that now streamed in torrents from her eyes.

'This grief on your part,' he continued at length, 'would disarm me of all resentment, had I ever for a single moment entertained any towards you. We have both a severe trial to undergo—a cruel ordeal to pass through; but we must nerve ourselves with becoming fortitude to fulfil our destiny. Nor

should we delay in entering on those separate paths which we are henceforth to pursue.'

'I understand you, Ernest,' said the Daughter of Satan,' again wiping away the tears which dimmed her lustrous eyes. 'You wish me to give you the desired explanations at once; but there are certain circumstances whereon I dare not touch, because they have connexion with *another*——'

'Oh! is it possible that you will leave me in the dark relative to those mysteries which surround yourself, and which in some sense exercise an influence upon my destiny?' exclaimed De Colmar, his voice and manner now conveying alike remonstrance and reproach. 'Surely, surely you can conjecture all I require to know? Tell me, then, wherefore you paraphrased the true history of the house of Ildegardo? tell me who you are, and in what degree of relationship you really stand with regard to Gloria? tell me who was the champion in black armor, whose lance stretched me upon the heath, and whose lips imposed such strange conditions? tell me why, loving me as you did, you bade me farewell for ever at Prague, and left me to the seductive wiles and fascinations of Gloria? tell me wherefore you rejoined me when Gloria's crimes compelled her to part company with me? tell me whether Zitzka is cognizant of all the strange duplicity which you have practised? and tell me, likewise, whether he has ever revealed to you any important secret concerning myself? Upon all these points do I implore your frankness and your candor,' added De Colmar, in a tone of impassioned vehemence, mingled with earnest entreaty.

'To-morrow morning will I explain as much as I dare,' answered Satanais, after a long pause, during which she remained wrapped up in a profound reflection. 'The excitement of this interview has produced a fever of the blood and a bewilderment of the ideas which render a few hours' repose absolutely necessary ere I can venture on a task that is both difficult and painful. I implore you, therefore, Ernest—I beseech you——'

'It shall be as you say, Satanais,' exclaimed the knight, compassionating the condition of that splendid being whom he had lately beholden so full of hope, and animation, and joy, and who was now so completely crushed beneath the weight of sorrow. 'Yes, you must indeed require tranquillity and rest; and not for worlds would I add unnecessary torture to that which already rends your soul. To-morrow morning, then, we shall meet again, and for the last time,' he added, in a tone the mournfulness of which he strove to subdue.

'To-morrow, and for the last time,' repeated Satanais, with accents of despair.

Sir Ernest de Colmar took her hand, pressed it for a moment in his own—and then rushed from the cell, without daring to cast another look upon the being whom he had loved so madly but who had deceived him so unaccountably.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

The night passed: the sun rose above the eastern horizon, lighting the fields to a dazzling green with its advancing rays, and bringing forth all the mellow richness of the autumnal tints of the groves.

As the mists of the morning were dissipated by the warmth of the orb of day, the romantic homesteads and picturesque cottages which dotted the surrounding country, stood forth in the strong relief of their white walls, or else appeared to form a natural portion of the landscape, covered as many were with wild festoons of luxuriant plants.

The gentle breeze renewed the spirit of life in the air; and the hum of insects appeared like the distant echoing of the melody poured forth by the warblers of the woods.

In the unclouded lustre of the sun, the river Moldau shone like a path of lapis lazuli, stretching through the meadows far as the eye could reach, and at length disappearing amongst the shades of the distant forest, the dark foliage of which, contrasting with the emerald brightness of the plains, gave depth and richness to the whole landscape.

It was an hour after this sublime sunrise that Sir Ernest de Colmar ascended to the roof of the Donjon. But he paused not a moment to gaze thence upon the loveliness of the scene displaying itself around, nor to glance at the ruins of the two fortalices in the horizon: ruled by one idea only, and which clung to him like an iron chain,

he sped hastily to the door of the turret-chamber occupied by Satanais.

For he had not closed his eyes in slumber throughout the night: but, like the restless ghost of some murdered victim, had he wandered about the ruins and along the river's bank, a prey to all the varied reflections which the incidents of the previous evening were only so well calculated to engender. And now that the long weary hours had passed, and that the moment was come when he could without impropriety intrude upon the privacy of Satanais, his anxiety to obtain the elucidation of the mysteries which bewildered him, had grown to the excitement of a burning fever of the brain.

For a few moments did he pause at the door ere he knocked, in order to certify to all his wildly beating pulses that he was the master of his thoughts and his actions—that he was laboring under no delusion in respect to all the strange things that now sprang up in his imagination, and that he was really awake and possessed of full consciousness, and was not walking under the influence of a horrible dream.

Yes, he paused a few moments, for although every nerve and every fibre thrilled with impatience to receive an explanation of all that so nearly concerned him, yet did every limb tremble with a vague apprehension and an unknown terror, as he found himself upon the point of having his ardent curiosity gratified.

At length, composing his countenance and his thoughts as well as he was able, the knight knocked at the door, which was immediately opened, and the two handmaidens came forth. They bestowed a respectful salutation upon Sir Ernest de Colmar, as they passed out of the turret-chamber; and he immediately observed that their countenances expressed a deep melancholy, and that their eyes were inflamed with weeping. But he had no opportunity to question them relative to the cause of their grief, for as the door was opened to afford them egress, the glance which he darted from their countenances to the interior of the cell, showed him Satanais reclining upon the outside of the couch. He accordingly entered the chamber, closing the door behind him.

'You are come, Ernest, for our last interview,' said the Daughter of Satan, in a tone that was scarcely audible.—But, alas! your looks are wild and haggard—your countenance is pale——oh! you have passed a night haunted by the most melancholy reflections!' she exclaimed, her voice rising with the anguish that thrilled through it.

'Yes, Satanais, I have indeed passed a wretched night,' said De Colmar, seating himself by the side of the couch, and pressing the dark houri's hand for a moment in his own—but only for a moment. 'Think you that I have not enough to afflict me? The fond hopes which I had entertained respecting yourself, are all blasted like flowers whereon the pestilence has breathed; I dare not, cannot, must not make you mine, and yet I love you as fervently as ever. Nor would I have again trusted myself within the magic influence of your charms, had not a deeper feeling than mere idle curiosity prompted me to receive the promised explanations from your lips. For at present, although I have learnt many wild and singular truths, there are mysteries still more numerous and more strange which you must clear up to me. The colored and highly-wrought version which you gave of the history that Bernard placed in its proper light, and divested of its oriental complexion and its supernatural texture,—that history, I say, which you thus tortured and exaggerated to suit your own mysterious purposes, to a certain extent linked my destiny with thine. At all events, I became your champion in a combat, the aim and object of which are now utterly incomprehensible to me; and I burn to hear the name of the man who defeated me upon that occasion, and who imposed upon me conditions which I am at a loss to understand. Hasten, then, Satanais—hasten, I conjure you, and relieve me from the most cruel suspense!'

'You spoke, Ernest, of having passed a wretched night,' said the Daughter of Satan, her voice again sounding low and plaintive, 'but the long hours were not more wearisome nor more fraught with bitter reflections for you than they were for me. And the fever of excitement caused my wound to bleed again,' she continued, glancing towards her bandaged arms; 'and I am weak and feeble with the loss of blood. Then, again, my handmaidens saw that I was unhappy; and I was compelled to reveal to those faithful girls enough to make them aware that circumstances would cause an eternal separation between you and me. Oh! altogether, I have indeed passed a terrible night——

such a night as I could not wish my worst enemy to experience.'

'Deeply, deeply, do I sympathise with you, Satanais,' said De Colmar, his voice and his looks expressing all he felt. 'And believe me, when I assure you that if my *friendship* can avail you in aught, you may command me. I have already, on a former occasion, told you that I am rich and influential—— But perhaps you are aware of all *that*, from a knowledge of the sources of my wealth and power?' he suddenly exclaimed, gazing fixedly upon her, as if to read the secrets of her soul.

'The offer of your friendship cannot solace me for the loss of your love,' responded Satanais, evading altogether a reply to the question contained in the latter portion of De Colmar's speech. 'And yet I thank you—oh! sincerely thank you for the proffer of assistance by means of your riches or your power. Nevertheless, I require nothing at your hands—nothing, save the promised pardon on which I may ponder ever more in that solitude whither I am so shortly to retire. And now I will commence the explanations which you demand, by taking up the thread of Bernard's narrative.

The knight drew his chair closer to the couch; and, fixing his eyes upon Satanais, he prepared to listen with attention to the forthcoming revelations.

'The old man,' she resumed, after a brief pause, 'broke off, you said, last night, at that point where the Castle of Manfredo was destroyed, and in the ruins of which he believed the Baroness of Ildegardo and her daughter Gloria to have perished. But before I allude to the manner of their escape, I must inform you that immediately after the Lady Emilia with her child became a captive in that fortalice, Baron Manfredo began to persecute her with avowals of his love. At first the unhappy lady treated him with scorn and made no attempt to conceal her aversion; she loathed him as the man who had contributed to the misfortunes which broke her husband's heart, and likewise as the wretch who had caused the deaths of her father and her sisters. Manfredo, obeying only his savage instincts, abandoned entreaty and such soft persuasion as he was capable of using, and had recourse to menaces. Terrified by those threats, the hapless Emilia changed her own course of proceeding towards him, and adopted all imaginable tactics to gain a delay. Trusting to circumstances to accomplish some change in her miserable condition, she implored a year's grace in order to mourn the death of her husband; and she promised at the expiration of that time to listen to the love suit of Manfredo. Captivated by her beauty, the glory of which was only subdued and not entirely destroyed by affliction, the baron assented to the compromise; and the twelve months had nearly expired, when the Baron of Altendorf sent to demand that the little Gloria should be consigned to his care, in order to be brought up under such female guardianship as he might choose to appoint.—This requisition was duly communicated by the Baron Manfredo to the Lady Emilia; and the latter, horrified at the thought of parting with her daughter, threw hersef at Manfredo's feet imploring him not to comply with the Lord of Altendorf's demand. Manfredo vowed that he would protect Gloria as if she were his own child, provided that Lady Emilia would become his wife forthwith; and the unhappy mother, though abhorring the man whom she looked upon as the murderer of her nearest and dearest relatives, nevertheless assented to the consummation of so tremendous a sacrifice for the sake of Gloria. The bridal was to take place in private and without any ostentatious ceremony; but on the very eve of the day fixed, the Baron of Altendorf arrived with his troops beneath the walls of Manfredo Castle. This commencement of hostilities caused the postponement of the marriage; and for nearly three weeks was Manfredo Castle defended with the utmost gallantry against the besiegers. But, at the expiration of that time, it was carried by storm—Manfredo was killed,—and the vassals, driven to despair, fired the stronghold. In the terrible confusion which followed, the Lady Emilia effected her escape, bearing Gloria in her arms; and, favored by the darkness of the night, she gained the neighboring woods. There she procured a peasant costume for herself and humble raiment for her daughter; and journeying towards Prague, she arrived in a few days within a distance of ten leagues from that city.—Fortunately she had brought away with her a vast quantity of jewels which Baron Manfredo had given her as a wedding present; and, converting a portion into money, she purchased a small cottage in a secluded spot, where she resolved to devote herself to the tender

task of rearing her child. But in order to escape any researches which the Baron of Altendorf might set on foot, should he happen to discover that herself and Gloria were still living, she adopted another name, and changed that of *Gloria* to *Maricita*. Two years passed away in uninterrupted tranquillity; and at the expiration of this period an incident occurred which was destined to produce no slight influence upon the future career of Gloria.'

Satanais paused for a few moments to gather breath, and perhaps likewise to arrange her thoughts and reminiscences in a suitable manner. She then resumed her narrative in these terms:

'It was on a fine summer evening that the Baroness Emilia was seated at her cottage door, imparting to Gloria—then nine years old—such instruction as her tender age enabled her to appreciate, when a horseman came thundering along the road which lay at a little distance. The maddened pace of the animal caused the baroness to start from her seat; and almost at the very next instant the steed diverged from the beaten track, rushed frantically towards the cottage, and threw its rider upon the low palings fencing the garden. The horse galloped away, and the baroness, assisted by an aged female domestic whom she kept, proceeded to afford the necessary succor to the stranger. But how great was the surprise of the baroness when she recognised in the thrown horseman her husband's former page, John Zitzka! He was perfectly insensible; and thus the recognition was not immediately mutual. Raising him from off the fence across which he had been so violently flung, the baroness and the servant conveyed Zitzka into the cottage and placed him upon a couch. Restoratives were administered, and in a short time he began to recover. By his uneasy movements, it became evident that his right arm was injured; and the old domestic proceeded to remove his doublet in order to ascertain what ailment he had received. But surely the hand of Providence was in all this; for no sooner was the right arm thus laid bare, when the baroness was transfixed with amazement on beholding the mark of a mulberry on the upper part of the limb!'

'What! John Zitzka the long lost son of Baron Georgey—the brother of the Baroness Emilia—and consequently the uncle of Gloria!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, in amazement at this most unexpected revelation.

'Yes—such was indeed the case,' replied Satanais; 'and when Zitzka came altogether to himself, he not only recognised in his benefactress the lady of his late master, Lord Ildegardo, but received from her own lips the astounding avowal that she was his sister! The baroness had purposely sent the old domestic out of the way for a short time, in anticipation of this scene; and you may conceive better than I can describe how fond was the embrace in which that brother and sister indulged—how interesting were the explanations they had mutually to give—and how profound was the sorrow experienced by Zitzka on learning the sad fate of his father and his self-immolated sisters. Relative to himself it appeared that on quitting the service of Lord Ildegardo, he had passed into Hungary, and joined an expedition that was about to march against a Turkish horde. In that campaign he had signalised himself in a manner which was rewarded with the rank of captain; and he had remained with the Hungarians until he rose to the grade of lieutenant-general. The war with Turkey then terminating, he revisited his native country and repaired to Prague, where his excellent testimonials procured him a high appointment about the person of the King of Bohemia. This office he had held about three or four months, when the accident occurred which threw him in the way of the Baroness Emilia in the manner already related. The injuries which he had sustained by the fall from his horse, compelled him to stay for several weeks at the cottage, and during that time he conceivd a profound affection for his little niece Gloria.'

'And did he not think of proclaiming his high birth and demanding the restoration of his estates which the crown had confiscated?' asked De Colmar.

'No—far from it,' replied Satanais. 'For when he learnt from the lips of the baroness all the terrible narrative of the Ildegardo family, he saw that if he were to assert his claims to the peerage and lands of Georgey, he must produce his sister as a witness in order to establish his identity with the lost son of the late baron; and by taking this step, such publicity would be given to the whole proceedings, that the formidable Lord of Altendorf could not fail to hear that the Lady Emilia was still in existence. The tribunal of the Bronze

Statue would then have instituted researches and discovered that Gloria was likewise in the land of the living, and the consequences might have been fatal in the extreme. All these matters were well weighed and calculated by the baroness and Zitzka; and as the latter had none of that morbid and ridiculous ambition which aspires to titles, nor that love of luxury which craves the possession of great wealth, he cheerfully sacrificed his own personal aggrandizement to the peace of mind of his sister and the security of his niece.'

'John Zitzka is a noble character!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, his countenance lighting up with the enthusiastic admiration he had always experienced for the Taborite hero. 'But pray continue your narrative, for I see that you have still much to reveal to my ears.'

'The relationship so singularly discovered between the Baroness Emilia and John Zitzka,' pursued Satanais, 'was kept profoundly secret from the old domestic, on account of the necessity of avoiding every circumstance that might direct public attention towards the lady who was dwelling in such strict seclusion with her daughter. Zitzka went back to Prague, to resume the duties of the king's household; but in the course of a few weeks he returned to pass some days at the cottage. It was on this occasion that the baroness was seized with a sudden and most severe illness; and although medical assistance was promptly procured by Zitzka from the nearest town, she rapidly grew worse. Finding her end approaching, she besought Zitzka to fulfil the dedicatory vow which her late husband and herself had pledged in respect to Gloria; and the weeping brother faithfully promised that when his niece attained the proper age, he would place her in a convent. Then, with her arm encircling the innocent girl's neck, and with her hand locked in the grasp of Zitzka, the baroness invoked heaven's choicest blessings upon the heads of those who were so near and dear to her—and her spirit fled forever!'

The voice of Satanais, which had been gradually growing fainter and more tremulous, was now lost in sobs; and, burying her countenance upon the pillow, she wept convulsively for a few minutes.

Then again, for the hundredth time, did the question recur to De Colmar's imagination—'Who could she be?' For this grief, so profoundly awakened, appeared to be such as a daughter would experience when memory renewed the touching scene of a mother's death-bed; and yet Satanais had said nothing to induce a belief that she was in any way related to the deceased Baroness Emilia of Ildegardo. Who, then, could she be?

'You seem to feel most deeply the reminiscences which this narrative has aroused in your mind?' said De Colmar, speaking in a low, gentle, and compassionating tone, so soon as the violence of the lady's affliction had somewhat abated.

'Oh! if you knew all—if I dared tell you all, Ernest!' exclaimed Satanais, raising her tear-bedewed countenance from the pillow, and wringing her hands with the strong paroxysm of her grief.

'Ah! well do I remember that upon a certain occasion Gloria made use of nearly those self-same words in a moment of mental anguish,' said the knight, struck by the coincidence. 'She also exclaimed, under the influence of feelings powerfully wrung, "*Oh! if I could tell you the truth—the whole truth at once——But, no—I am mad to think of it!*" What, then, is this truth which Gloria longed to reveal, yet dared not? and to what did *you* allude, Satanais, when you ere now expressed a similar feeling?'

'Ah! torture me not with these questions, Ernest, I implore you!' cried Satanais. 'But let me continue my narrative—that is to say,' she added in a more reflective tone, 'as much as I am at liberty to unfold. To resume, then, the thread of my history, I must proceed to state that immediately after my mother was consigned to the tomb ——'

'Your mother, Satanais?' exclaimed De Colmar, his voice and looks denoting a wild and bewildered amazement.

And the Daughter of Satan, instantaneously starting with the air and manner of one who has just let slip a most unintentional admission, became overwhelmed with confusion.

But at the same instant, and ere another word was exchanged upon the subject, the sounds of loud voices and heavy footsteps approaching outside, reached the ears of De Colmar and the Daughter of Satan.

'What! are we again menaced with an attack by that Carthusian and his vile

horde?' exclaimed the Austrian warrior, starting to his feet and drawing his sword.

The next moment the door was thrown open, and one of John Zitzka's captains, followed by half-a-dozen Taborites, appeared upon the threshold. Behind this little band, old Bernard was seen supporting Linda and Beatrice, who were evidently laboring under a profound terror.

'What means this intrusion, my friends?' demanded Sir Ernest de Colmar, who, on recognising the Taborite uniform, was struck with amazement at so unceremonious and even apparently hostile a proceeding on their part.

'There must be some mistake,' cried Satanais, to whom the countenance of the captain of the band was well known —'or else perhaps danger menaces us, and these brave men have been despatched to our succor,' she added, starting from the couch.

'Lady, there is no error on our part, I can assure you,' said the Taborite officer, in a firm but respectful tone.—'We are acting in obedience to the positive commands of the Captain-General, and you must consider yourself our prisoner.'

'I—your prisoner!' ejaculated Satanais, the blood rushing to her countenance, and suffusing even her neck and bosom with its crimson glow, while her magnificent eyes flashed forth the fires of indignation.

'With sorrow, lady, do I execute orders which are peremptory,' said the Taborite captain, advancing towards her. But there is no alternative; for John Zitzka, the Governor of Bohemia, has commanded me to make you my prisoner, and bear you back with all possible expedition to Prague.'

'I will not consent to this tyranny!' exclaimed Satanais, drawing herself proudly up to her full height. 'Sir Ernest de Colmar, to you I appeal——'

'Most assuredly no violence shall be offered to you in my presence,' interrupted the knight, with a resolute air.

'Then, soldiers, do your duty!' cried the captain, and the Taborites precipitated themselves into the turret-chamber.

Sir Ernest de Colmar instantaneously rushed in front of Satanais to protect her; but the place was too small to enable him to wield his sword with any effect; and, while he was engaging with three of the soldiers, the others rushed violently past him and seized upon Satanais.

With a desperate effort did she endeavor to break from their grasp and draw her poniard; but, behold! in the hasty struggle the bandage fell from her wounded arm!

Then a piercing shriek burst from her lips, a shriek which was echoed by the lips of both Linda and Beatrice, who, from their position on the roof outside, were watching with terrified looks all that was taking place within the turret chamber.

At those rending sounds, the conflict between De Colmar and the Taborites suddenly ceased; and every eye was directed towards Satanais, who, having given vent to her anguish in that thrilling note of despair, fell back insensible upon the couch.

Then from the lips of De Colmar and the Taborites burst ejaculations of the wildest wonderment: for, behold! the flesh of that part of the arm whence the bandage had fallen, was white as snow—and it became evident in an instant that the dark complexion of Satanais was an artificial dye, and not a natural tint!

'Away with her!' exclaimed the captain, who was the first to recover from the astonishment produced by this scarcely credible discovery.

'No, you shall not remove her!' thundered Sir Ernest de Colmar. 'There are mysteries regarding myself which she must clear up ere I consent to separate from her.'

And the knight with a giant strength hurled back the soldiers from the vicinage of the couch where the Daughter of Satan lay stretched, deprived of all consciousness.

'One word, Sir Ernest de Colmar!' cried the captain.

'Not a syllable!' exclaimed the Austrian warrior, brandishing his weapon. 'I command you to retire.'

'Our orders are peremptory, Sir knight!' said the captain. ''Tis John Zitzka who hath sent us——'

'Then, if there be any virtue in this ring, I order you to depart!' interrupted De Colmar, displaying the Taborite chieftain's talismanic gift.

The soldiers instantaneously recognised the jewel, and shrank back in obedience to the authority of him who wore it; but the captain, taking a letter from the breast of his doublet, exclaimed, 'I beseech your excellency to read this!'

Sir Ernest de Colmar seized the document, rent away the silken string which fastened it, tore it open, and glanced over the contents with the rapidity of one who deeply felt that he stood on the threshold of some astounding discovery.

The letter contained but a few words, and these were as follow:

"Pause ere it be too late—I conjure you to pause! nor interfere with the commands which my emissaries must execute, by fair means or foul. *For Gloria and Satanais are one and the same person!*"

As if a thunderbolt had stricken him, Sir Ernest de Colmar reeled and staggered beneath the force of this tremendous revelation; his sword fell from one hand, the letter dropped from the other—a dizziness seized upon his brain, as if his senses were abandoning him, and he sank down without a moan on the pavement floor of the turret-chamber.

CHAPTER LXXX.

ALTENDORF CASTLE.

The reader has not forgotten that funeral procession which was on its way from Prague to Altendorf Castle; nor will he fail to recollect that when it halted at the inn where Ermach, the page, was assassinated by Gloria, Father Cyprian learnt all the details of that black deed from the lips of the landlord and landlady. The manner in which Gloria had made her escape excited in the priest's mind a suspicion of the most extraordinary nature; and his sagacity, assisted by the knowledge of some portions of Gloria's earlier history, led him to the speedy conclusion that there was in reality no such being as Satanais, or rather that the Daughter of Glory and the Daughter of Satan were one and the same person.

This astounding discovery, the certainty of which he could not for an instant doubt, rendered him more than ever anxious to wreak his vengeance upon that singular being of such transcendent loveliness; and, having ascertained from the landlord of the way-side hostel that Linda and Beatrice were continuing their journey southward in company with Sir Ernest de Colmar, his shrewdness enabled him to penetrate at a glance into the meaning of this arrangement. In a word, he saw as clearly as possible that though *Gloria* might have disappeared on account of the hue and cry raised by the murder, yet that *Satanais* (or rather, the Daughter of Glory changed for the time into the Daughter of Satan) would rejoin the knight's party at some point farther along the road. Impatient, therefore, to make the lady his prisoner, he took with him half a dozen of the armed men belonging to the funeral procession; and taking a temporary leave of the Baron of Altendorf, the Marquis of Schomberg, and the Princess Elizabetha, he hastened on in advance, accompanied by his bravos.

Urging their horses to the utmost speed, the Carthusian and his followers spared not the panting animals; and obtaining frequent relays at certain way-side inns where they were well known and the landlords of which were secret agents of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue, they were enabled to make immense progress in a very short time. At the hostel where De Colmar's party had spent the previous night,—that same hostel where Satanais rejoined the knight and whence Angela departed so precipitately,—the Carthusian found that he was still upon the right track; and, provided with fresh steeds, he and his bravos continued the chase as if life and death depended upon the issue.

But, on the other hand, the Austrian knight and his party rode leisurely along the grand highway; and thus their pursuers were gaining upon them with an almost incredible speed. By frequent inquiries at the way-side inns and cottages, the Carthusian still kept in the right track; and he also gleaned the accurate information as to the course adopted by De Colmar and his companions when they diverged from the road leading near Altendorf Castle and struck into the more circuitous route which swept past the ruins of Ildegardo Castle.

On approaching those blackened and mouldering remains of a once mighty stronghold, Father Cyprian observed three figures on the roof of the Donjon; and his quick eye enabled him to recognise Sir Ernest de Colmar. That the female who was with him, and who likewise wore a plumed cap, must be Satanais, he did not doubt; but who the third person was, he knew not.

This indeed was old Bernard, as the reader has doubtless perceived.

Entering a wood, the Carthusian and his bravos dismounted from their horses, and thence they gained the ruins on foot, penetrating into the midst of the scene of dilapidation at a different point from that where the knight's grooms and the lady's handmaidens were waiting at the time. The result of the attack which was soon after made upon De Colmar and Satanais, is already known to our readers; but the explanations just chronicled were requisite to fill up a slight gap previously existing in our narrative.

Baffled, defeated, and with a heart full of rage and bitterness, the Carthusian fled into the wood where the horses had been left, and where he was almost immediately joined by the only one of his followers who had survived the conflict. Mounting their steeds, and abandoning the others to the wolves of the forest, the priest and his myrmidon fled with all possible speed in the direction of Altendorf Castle; nor did they consider themselves safe from pursuit until they arrived within sight of the colossal towers and frowning walls of that vast fortalice.

It was late in the evening when the fugitive priest and his follower entered the castle. The Count of Rosenberg had arrived there about a couple of hours previously; and, having made to Lord Rodolph the communication with which he was entrusted, the nobleman had taken his departure for his own dwelling.

Thus, when Father Cyprian reached the feudal stronghold of Altendorf, he was rejoiced to find that Rodolph had already begun the necessary preparations to receive the Princess Elizabetha, and to welcome his father's return. All these arrangements were, however, confined to the left wing and adjacent buildings of the vast stronghold; and the *right wing* was still abandoned to its desolation, its gloom, and its rapidly advancing decay. Not that Lord Rodolph was influenced by any private motive in thus refraining from all attempts to render so large a portion of the establishment available for the use of the distinguished guests who were about to take up their abode in Altendorf Castle; but as the arrival of these guests was expected in a few hours—at all events some time in the course of the day—there was not leisure to make any effectual improvements in those suites of rooms which for so many years had been abandoned to utter neglect and the ravages of decay.

But throughout the left wing and all the buildings connected therewith, bustle and activity prevailed. The banquetting-hall was adorned with banners — the side-boards were covered with plate. Every bed-chamber was put into requisition; and immense supplies of provisions were ordered in from the nearest farms on the Altendorf domain. Messengers were likewise despatched to every village within the boundary of that vast estate, to summon a sufficient number of vassals to form a strong garrison at the castle; and masons were already at work in repairing the walls and increasing the defences of the stronghold. On one side Lord Rodolph was issuing the various orders necessary for the carrying out of these arrangements; and, on the other hand, old Hubert was bustling in every direction to see that the domestic preparations were proceeding on a scale of magnificence suitable to the wealth, rank, and hospitality of the powerful Baron of Altendorf.

Brief was the conversation which took place between Lord Rodolph and the Carthusian priest that night. The former was fully occupied in the manner already mentioned; and the latter, wearied almost to death by the immense distance he had ridden and the fatigues he had endured that day, was glad to retire to his couch so soon as he had exchanged a few words with the young nobleman.

In the afternoon of the following day the expected procession defiled across the draw-bridge into Altendorf Castle. Lord Rodolph welcomed the princess with the profoundest respect, and a guard of honor was drawn up to receive her. Then, at the moment she alighted from her horse, the martial music commenced a national air, and to the flag-staff on the central tower rose the royal standard of Bohemia.

This was the signal for the uplifting of a myriad of voices upon the battlements; and from roof and tower, turret and wall, outworks and Donjon-Keep, rose the shouts of acclaim sent forth by the assembled vassals of Altendorf.

Then the baron, who had dismounted from his horse, sank on one knee in the presence of Elizabetha, and exclaimed,

'Welcome to my halls, illustrious Queen of Bohemia!'

Again and again did the shouts ascend from all points, making the welkin ring; and now for the first time that day did a roseate tinge animate the pale cheeks of Elizabetha, and a faint smile appear upon her lips. In a few words, spoken in a low and tremulous voice, she thanked the Baron of Altendorf and his son for their courtesy; then, beckoning her handmaidens to follow her, she hastened to the suite of chambers which had been prepared for her reception.

In the evening a grand banquet took place in the great hall which was decorated for the occasion. The queen (as Elizabetha was now called) excused herself from being present on the plea of excessive fatigue; but the assemblage was a brilliant one, invitations having been sent to all the noble families residing in that district.

Upwards of two hundred guests, male and female, were then gathered around the Baron of Altendorf's hospitable board; and the health of the new Queen of Bohemia was pledged in brimming goblets. Confusion and death were as fervently drunk to John Zitzka and his Taborite host; and thus, by the proceedings of this memorable day, was the gauntlet as resolutely thrown down on the side of the royalists as the civil war had been deliberately proclaimed at Prague on the occasion of the review of the armaments of Mount Tabor.

It was near midnight; the lamps still burnt brilliantly in the banquetting-hall, and the festivity was prolonged. Few of the ladies had as yet retired; and the eyes of those who remained sparkled as lustrously as the gems which glistened on their hair. The ruby wine had circulated freely; the nobles had all with one accord given in their adhesion to the royalist rebellion; and the same unanimity had prevailed in acknowledging the Baron of Altendorf generalissimo of the queen's forces.

Nevertheless, there was *one* present who, although he dared not offer any objections to that appointment, nor even suffer his features to wear an expression of dissatisfaction, was deeply chagrined at the slight thus passed upon himself. His haughty nature was offended—his pride was wounded—his ambition was disappointed. He had hoped that his exalted rank and his immense wealth, both superior to the Lord of Altendorf, would have been taken into consideration—the more especially as he was chosen president of the council of nobles that assembled a few weeks previously at Prague, and whose deliberations were so abruptly cut short by the expeditious as well as the resolute measures adopted on that occasion by the captain-general of the Taborites.

The reader, therefore, has already comprehended that the dissatisfied nobleman was none other than the Marquis of Schomberg; and while the numerous guests present at the banquet were congratulating the Baron of Altendorf on the unanimity which to all appearance prevailed in recognising him as the most fit and proper chieftain to conduct the mighty undertaking resolved upon, the demon of discontent, baffled rivalry, and jealous hatred, was already torturing the heart of the Marquis. But he composed his countenance and veiled his feelings with a strong effort; nay, more, he even forced his lips to frame words of compliment amongst the rest, and no one suspected his sincerity.

It was near midnight, we said; and still the feast was prolonged. And it was at a moment when the enthusiasm was at its height, when the wine was circulating with a more than usual rapidity, when the eyes of the ladies shone like stars, and the cheeks of the nobles were flushed with the juice of the grape—and when, too, the music had just ceased a stirring air of martial fervor—it was at this moment, we say, that one of the peers arose and waved his hand to enjoin silence.

Then, in a strain of burning eloquence, the speaker expatiated upon the position of her whom they had all that day acknowledged as their queen: an orphan, without relatives to advise or succor her, and with no dear or valued friends of her own sex, to become her confidants. The noble orator represented her as standing more isolated in the world than the meanest of her subjects, although she was surrounded by thousands ready to die for her; and he drew a pathetic picture of the hapless lot of a youthful queen unsupported by loving relatives, possessed of no friends familiarized to her by long acquaintance, and compelled to unbosom all her little secret thoughts, her hopes, and her fears, to strangers, or else keep them pent up in her own breast. The speaker then dexterously touched upon the valor, loyalty, and patriotism, exhi-

bited by the Baron of Altendorf in making his castle the head quarters of the rising against the Taborites; and from that topic he slipped back to his observations on the queen's lonely position, following up his remarks with an opinion that her own happiness and the public welfare would be best ensured by her immediate union with the scion of some noble family. Such an alliance, the speaker declared in conclusion, would give satisfaction to the Bohemian aristocracy, inasmuch as a king would thus be raised up from their body; the people would approve of the measure, as a guarantee against those court intrigues, innovations, and changes, which invariably followed in the train of a foreign prince-consort; and the elevation of a Bohemian to the throne-matrimonial would annihilate all pretexts for the intervention of neighboring states.

This speech was welcomed with thunders of applause on the part of the nobles present; while the ladies testified their satisfaction by the waving of gloves and handkerchiefs.

Then—quickly as the idea itself circulated throughout the hall—did the name of Lord Rodolph begin to fly from tongue to tongue, until all those voices combined and swelled into a grand and enthusiastic chorus, proclaiming the Baron of Altendorf's son as the fitting and favorite candidate for the hand of Queen Elizabeth!

But though the Marquis of Schomberg joined in the general cry, and forced his lips to wreathe themselves into smiles, yet this new phase in the proceedings of the night was adding gall to the wormwood which already filled his soul with bitterness, and pouring molten lead upon flesh already seared with red-hot iron.

Lord Rodolph rose to express his gratitude for the honor and the kindness shown him by his father's guests. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes glowed with joy, and pride, and triumph; and he spoke well, long, and fervidly.—When he ceased, the spacious hall rang again and again with enthusiastic shouts, and the goblets were filled and emptied in honor of his name. It was a sort of delirium that prevailed in that banquetting-room—a fever of the blood and an exaltation of the brain, engendered by strong political feeling, fostered by the consciousness that grand, serious, and irrecoverable steps had been that day taken, and enhanced by the bacchanalian beverage which crowned the cups.—Lightning appeared to run in the veins and to flash forth from the eyes, and men and women alike abandoned themselves to the full flow of those spirits so unnaturally excited.

To the Marquis of Schomberg it became apparent, painfully apparent, that the aristocracy of Bohemia would cheerfully hail the union of the queen with the young Lord Rodolph; and that, should the royalist cause succeed in the long run against the Taborite dominion, the name of Altendorf would be paramount in the country.

It was past midnight when the guests rose from the table and dispersed to seek their respective chambers. The lamps were then extinguished in the banquetting-hall, the servants, wearied with the bustle of the day, retired to rest, the sentinels were relieved along the walls, and comparative silence prevailed throughout the immense feudal fortalice.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE PRIEST AND THE BARON.

Father Cyprian was present at the early stage of the grand festival; but he had retired some hours before the proposition was made respecting an aliance between Lord Rodolph and Queen Elizabetha.

Early on the following morning he issued forth from his own chamber; and, encountering Hubert in one of the corridors, he bade him repair to the Baron of Altendorf's apartment and ascertain whether his lordship could grant him an immediate interview. The old steward proceeded to execute this commission; and, in a few minutes, he returned to conduct the priest to the baron's apartment.

'Good morrow, holy father,' said the nobleman, who had not quitted his couch. 'You have risen betimes, meseems; but then you remained not so ong at the board as the rest of us. And now, what business of importance has brought thee thus early to my chamber? No evil tidings, I hope?'

'No, my lord,' replied the priest.—'But I was anxious to say a few words to your lordship *in private*,' he continued, looking in a significant manner towards the old steward, who was lingering in the chamber.

'If it be aught that Hubert may not

hear, he will retire,' said the baron.—'But you know, good father, that there are few secrets of ours with which he is unacquainted,—and that he has been the sworn custodian of the Bronze Statue for upwards of five and twenty years.'

'I am fully aware of all Hubert's eminent services and of the implicit confidence which may be put in him,' answered the priest. 'Nay, more,—I would trust my very life to his keeping. But as I would fain converse with your lordship on family matters——'

'Be it so,' exclaimed the baron.—'Hubert, you may retire.'

The old steward bowed and quitted the apartment; but, instead of hastening away from its vicinage, he passed into an adjoining chamber, or small cabinet, which was separated only by a wainscotting from the baron's room.—He was, therefore, enabled to overhear the greater portion of the dialogue which now ensued between his master and the Carthusian.

'Now that we are alone together,' said the baron, 'your reverence may speak fearlessly.'

'I sought your lordship thus early,' observed the priest, 'because I was fearful that the various avocations which the number of your guests and the preparatives for the war will necessarily entail upon you, might preclude the possibility of our finding an opportunity for private conference when once the bustle and business of the day shall have begun.'

'I presume, then, that you wish to give me some details of that expedition which you undertook the day before yesterday, and the failure of which you took occasion to intimate to me in a word last night?' said the baron, interrogatively.

'No, I did not intend to trouble your lordship with a long narrative on that head,' responded the priest. 'Suffice it to say that my purpose was defeated by the sudden appearance of that same person who rescued your lordship, the Marquis of Schomberg, and the Count of Rosenberg from the Castle of Prague.'

'And five of our gallant fellows were lost—was it not so?' demanded the baron.

'Alas! such was the case,' replied the Carthusian. 'The Austrian and your liberator in the bright armor fought like demons,—and the result is known to you.'

'The liberator of myself and fellow-prisoners was a certain Angelo Wildon—was he not?' said the baron. 'And now I remember that you promised to make some communication relative to this youth. Is it for such a purpose that you have sought me now?'

'Partially,' answered the Carthusian. 'Learn, then, that the being who effected your liberation from the Castle of Prague and who fights with all the prowess of a man, is a woman, a lovely young woman——'

'A woman!' exclaimed the baron, starting up in his couch with amazement. 'Impossible! And yet—now that I recollect—the countenance which that bright vizor revealed, when raised, was of a delicate complexion and feminine cast——'

'It is as I have told your lordship,' interrupted the priest. 'That being is a woman, a beauteous woman; and, for aught I know, a virtuous one too. But what is more important than all, is that your son has conceived a violent passion for her.'

'Rodolph in love with my liberatrix!' ejaculated the baron. 'Then he knows her? he sent her to deliver me from captivity? he was at the bottom of it all?'

'Nothing of the kind, my lord,' said Father Cyprian coolly. 'Angela Wildon is the adopted daughter of Lord Rosenberg's principal forest-keeper; and your son, having seen her, fell desperately in love with her. On one occasion he endeavored to carry her off, when she was rescued by the Austrian, who was on his way hither at the time. Hence the hostility which Lord Rodolph conceived for that personage,—hence also the vindictive letter which he wrote to you concerning him. Subsequently, your son succeeded in getting Angela into his power; and for some days she was a prisoner in the State Chamber.'

'In the State Chamber!' repeated the baron, his countenance becoming livid with indignation. 'Oh! if Rodolph dared to do this, and if Hubert permitted him——'

'Tranquillise yourself, my lord,' said the priest. 'Remember that your son knows nothing respecting the tribunal of the Bronze Statue—that he is as far from suspecting the existence of the dread engine of punishment in the subterraneans of your castle, as he is unaware of what is passing at this moment a thousand miles off; and that if he choose to gratify a whim or caprice

by placing the maiden in the State Chamber, it was impossible for Hubert to gainsay him.'

'True,' observed the baron in a musing tone. 'You are aware that I have ever entertained a firm and unchangeable resolution never to allow my son—my only son—to be initiated into the terrible mysteries of the Bronze Statue. No, sooner would I slay him with my own hand,' cried the Lord of Altendorf, becoming fearfully excited. 'And yet it is from no disrespect towards the tribunal itself——'

'My lord, I am acquainted with the reason,' said the priest; 'do not—do not, I implore you, give way to reminiscences of so appalling a description. Your motive for keeping Rodolph in utter ignorance of all the mysteries of our tribunal, so that he may never have access to the registers——'

'And never know whose name is included amongst the victims chronicled in those registers,' added the baron, a cloud of portentous darkness overspreading his countenance. 'No, such knowledge would embitter his existence—haunt him like a ghost—pursue him like a night-mare——'

'Calm yourself, I implore you, my lord,' exclaimed the priest. 'The past cannot be recalled——'

'Nor should it be, even if I were able to live my life over again!' said the baron, in a stern and even ferocious tone. 'No, it was guilt deservedly punished: deep, damning guilt! and I have no pity for *her* who paid the penalty of her crimes. But *he* must never know it—*he*—my son—must never be led to suspect——'

'Enough, my lord—enough upon that point!' cried the Carthusian, in a tone of earnest entreaty. 'We were talking of Lord Rodolph's love for that humble forest maiden, Angela Wildon——'

'And he dares to love a peasant girl with such a strong affection?' exclaimed the baron. 'But surely he would not make her his wife? surely he would not forget how pure is the blood which flows in his veins, and consent to mingle it with that plebeian puddle?'

'At the time when Angela Wildon was his prisoner, he would have laid his rank, his name, his future prospects, and every thing he possessed or was heir to, at her feet,' replied Father Cyprian. 'How far his sentiments may have been changed by the brilliant alliance now opened to his contemplation, remains to be seen. For three days, at all events, was she a captive in this castle. It was on that occasion when I journeyed hither from Prague to communicate certain instruction to your son relative to the defence of the castle, in case the Taborites should make a diversion against it, while the Council was sitting in the metropolis. I then saw Angela here, at the very moment when she was brought in a prisoner. It appears that she subsequently escaped in a most unaccountable manner; but Lord Rodolph firmly believes that old Hubert, taking compassion upon her, set her free. This much he told me last evening, during a brief discourse which I had with his lordship.'

'Or was it not more probable that she discovered one of the secret avenues conducting to the subterraneans?' askod the Baron.

'I know not what opinion to form upon that head,' replied the priest.—'At all events she escaped—she fled—and the next time I fell in with her was at a village inn a few miles from Prague. To be brief, I endeavored to render her an inmate of the White Mansion, well knowing that your lordship would be pleased to find, on learning this love which your son has conceived for her, that a barrier had been raised up between him and her. But in that attempt I failed; and the third time I encountered her was when she accompanied your lordship, the Marquis of Schomberg, and the Count of Rosenberg to the White Mansion, on the night of your liberation from the Castle of Prague.'

'But what motive could she possibly have had in effecting our escape?' demanded the baron.

'None that I can comprehend, unless it were devotion to the Count of Rosenberg, her adopted parents' master,' said the priest; 'and thus, in liberating one, she found it equally easy to accomplish the emancipation of all three.'

'A female—a delicate female, young and beautiful, would scarcely be swayed by motives so thoroughly disinterested,' said the baron, in a musing tone. 'But are you sure that she does not love Lord Rodolph in return?'

'He would have made her his wife, in defiance of even your lordship's displeasure, and she fled from him,' answered the priest. 'Was this love on her part? Judge for yourself.'

'She assuredly does *not* love him, then,' remarked the baron.

'No—and in my opinion she loves

the Austrian,' continued the Carthusian; 'for she delivered him from the sworn servitors at the White Mansion she travelled in his society a considerable portion of the way from Prague —and she suddenly re-appeared again the day before yesterday to rescue him and Sister Marietta from my clutches. Is there not devotion—a woman's devotion in all this?'

'Yes,' replied the baron. 'And you tell me that she is again in this neighborhood?'

'She was amongst the ruins of Ildegardo the day before yesterday,' responded the Carthusian, 'and it is most probable that she was on her way homeward at the time.'

'But is it not likely that she will accompany the Austrian, whose life she has thus saved?' inquired the baron. 'And will he not make her his mistress? since we know that it is altogether improbable she can become his wife.'

'No—the Austrian is an honorable man,' returned the Carthusian, with an ironical sneer. 'He would not treat Angela ungenerously, even if her own virtue were somewhat of the easiest—which I do not apprehend it to be. Therefore, all things duly considered, it amounts to a certainty that the maiden will part company with him and return to her forest-home. Indeed, she is most probably there already.'

'And what would your reverence have me infer from all this?' asked the baron.

'That Lord Rodolph may fall in with her again—that her beauty may revive the fury of his passion—and that he may prefer a simple barony with the chosen of his heart, to the throne of Bohemia with one whom he perhaps cannot love.'

, Admirably reasoned,' said the baron. 'I did not fail to perceive the spirit of Father Cyprian in the speech of the nobleman who pleaded so touchingly in favor of a husband for her majesty last night.'

'It was indeed at my suggestion that the speech was made,' observed the holy father. 'Perceiving the enthusiasm which prevailed in your lordship's favor, and how completely the assembled nobles looked up to you as the head and chief of this movement, I was suddenly inspired with an idea that it would be a marvellously fine stroke of policy to take advantage of that excitement. The thought struck me all in a moment: 'twas as a spark flashing from a flint when the iron heel comes in contact with it, and which tiny scintillation may fire a vast train of gunpowder in an instant. I whispered to the nobleman who sate next to me, and who was already heated with wine; and I saw that he caught up the idea with a greediness showing how proud he should be to take the initiative in the plan. Having thus paved the way, I retired, confident as to the result. And now, baron, are you displeased with me?'

'On the contrary, I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, my dear friend,' exclaimed the Lord of Altendorf. 'Once let my son be King of Bohemia, with myself Generalissimo of the Forces and Prime Minister into the bargain,—and your reverence may then boldly and openly aspire to the Popedom.'

'Yes, with such influence to support my pretensions; and those pretensions previously authorised by the Archiepiscopal Primacy of Bohemia,' said the ambitious priest, in a tone of triumph. 'This arrangement will prove a more politic and advantageous one than our original idea of marrying the Princess to the Duke of Austria.'

'In all respects save *one*, my good friend,' observed the Baron of Altendorf,' fixing his eyes with a mysterious significancy upon the priest,—'and that reason, which you can full well divine, alone makes me hesitate. For I experience a species of compunction, a kind of remorse, when I contemplate the idea of suffering my son to take to his bosom and to his bed a woman who has been the mistress of another; and all queen though she now be——'

'Lord Rodolph will scarcely entertain a suspicion relative to the chastity of his wife,' interrupted Father Cyprian, impatiently. 'But if such sentimental considerations as these are to stand in the way of your lordship's ambition, better were it to cast to the winds all our grand schemes and projects at once.'

And rising angrily from his seat, the Carthusian began to pace the room with rapid and uneven steps.

'Nay, yield not to wrathful feelings, holy father,' said the baron. 'You will admit with me that the matter to which I alluded is a calamity, a great calamity —but, as your words implied, it must not be allowed to stand in the way of our ambition. No, I am not the man to hesitate at such trifles. Rodolph

shall become the queen's husband; and the sooner the ceremony is performed, the better. The assembled nobles and their ladies are all hot upon it at present; and we will have the nuptial noose tied ere they have leisure for reflection. Besides, since this Angela Wildon is again in the neighborhood ——'

'Wherefore should not the marriage take place to-morrow evening?' demanded the priest, stopping abruptly short in his hurried walk and fixing his eyes upon the baron.

'So soon? so speedily?' exclaimed the latter. 'How is it possible that her majesty can be sufficiently prepared——'

'Leave all that to me,' interrupted the Carthusian. 'Is she not a mere puppet in my hands? and was it not to render her a thus obedient automaton, that I reduced her to what she is? Give your consent to the celebration of the marriage to-morrow evening, issue your commands for the necessary festivities, and I will guarantee that her majesty shall appear at the proper moment before the altar. The Bohemians will then have confidence in this warlike movement which we are initiating; they will perceive that her majesty has allied herself to one of the most powerful families in the country; and, what is more,' added the priest, his voice sinking to a solemn whisper, 'all the adherents of the Bronze Statue will be incited to activity in the royal cause.'

'Your arguments are irresistible, holy father,' said the baron, 'and every thing shall be done in pursuance of your advice. Such being our resolve, it is unnecessary to take any steps to remove Angela Wildon from the vicinage of Altendorf.'

'Quite unnecessary,' responded the priest. 'But if your lordship had not yielded to my counsel respecting this early celebration of the marriage, it would have been expedient to take some steps with regard to the beauty of the forest. And now, my lord, we understand each other; and our conference is at an end.'

'One word!' exclaimed the baron.—, Think you that Lord Rosenberg will be pleased with the matrimonial arrangement? He was not of our party last night, inasmuch as he is doubtless busily employed in placing his own fortalice in a condition of defence. But he is too useful as well as too powerful for us to offend——'

'He will not be offended,' said the priest, calmly. 'Had he a son of his own to put forward as a candidate for the queen's hand, it were different.—Besides, having escaped from the custody of Zitzka, he is seriously compromised and cannot retrace his way. No, it is not the ambition of the Count of Rosenberg that we shall have to dread,—but if there be amongst us an individual on whom we must keep a sharp eye——'

'Ah! do your suspicions fall elsewhere?' exclaimed the baron.

'Yes, upon the Marquis of Schomberg,' replied the priest.

'Have you any reason for thus alluding to him?' demanded the baron.

'As yet I have no positive grounds of suspicion,' responded the Carthusian —'but I know him well—understand him thoroughly—and therefore doubt him. Your lordship's appointment to the chief command of the royalist forces is unquestionably galling to the ambition of the marquis.'

'But he congratulated me as warmly as the rest,' observed the baron.

'Nevertheless, I shall keep a strict watch upon his lordship,' returned the priest.

And, with these words, he quitted the room.

A few minutes afterwards, old Hubert emerged from his place of concealment; and, descending to the lower regions of the spacious edifice, he entered the subterraneans by one of the secret means of communication with those places of mystery and terror.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE GUARANTEE.

The intelligence speedily circulated like wild-fire throughout the castle, that the marriage of the queen and Lord Rodolph was to take place on the following evening; and the most extensive preparations were set on foot in order that the nuptials might be celebrated with fitting pomp and splendor. It was understood that the Carthusian priest had been appointed by the baron to communicate the wishes of her faithful nobles and adherents to her majesty; and rumor likewise declared that the young queen had assented to a proposal which policy had recommended, and against which her own inclinations ex-

hibited no repugnance. Nevertheless, Elizabetha remained secluded in her own chamber, and pleaded the continuance of fatigue as an apology for not joining the festive party in the evening at the banquetting-table.

The day was spent by the nobles and ladies in hunting and hawking in the forest; and by the baron and Lord Rodolph in superintending the sumptuous arrangements which were in progress for the nuptials, as well as the warlike preparations that were necessary for the coming strife. The castle therefore presented a scene of gaiety, animation, and bustle, such as its walls had not witnessed for many a year; and the occasional voice of military command, as well as the peal of merry laughter, aroused those echoes which long had slumbered in the remote nooks and corners of the spacious edifice.

Here pipes of wine were rolled through the court-yard, under the superintendence of the burly butler; there cannon were dragged along the ramparts beneath the inspection of a military chieftain. Now the drawbridge groaned under the ponderous wagon laden with provisions; now it vibrated beneath the wheels of the gun-carriage and the ammunition-cart. Troops of well armed vassals flocked in from all directions; stout farmers and pretty dairy-maidens came with their provender; and fresh arrivals of royalist nobles, followed by numerous retinues, were reported to the baron from time to time throughout the day.

When evening came, the banquetting hall was thronged with a brilliant company; and the guests had just taken their places at the board, when one of the numerous valets in attendance announced the Baroness Hamelen.

Her ladyship, who had only just arrived in time to make the necessary change in her toilette ere the deep-toned bell of the castle proclaimed the signal for the festival, was cordially greeted by the Baron of Altendorf, the Carthusian, and the Marquis of Schomberg; and Lord Rodolph was presented to her in due form. To many of the guests she was known personally, and to all by name; few were acquainted with her real character, and these were members of the vast fraternity of the Bronze Statue; to the greater portion, therefore, she appeared only in the light of a woman as remarkable for her boundless charity as she was celebrated for her beauty, her fascinating manners, and her accomplishments.

'What incident has afforded us the unlooked-for pleasure of your ladyship's presence?' asked the Baron of Altendorf, when he had placed the Baroness Hamelen on his right hand, the Marquis of Schomberg occupying the chair immediately next to her.

'The terrible Zitzka has threatened to place a Taborite garrison in my mansion and my castle,' was the response; 'and not choosing to trust myself among his lawless hordes, I deemed it prudent to fly secretly and obtain an asylum beneath your lordship's hospitable roof.'

'And most cordially welcome is your ladyship,' said the baron. 'But what, then, has become of all the pensioners whom your ladyship's bounty maintains in your two establishments?'

'Alas! I was compelled to leave them there,' replied the baroness. 'But no harm will befall them; inasmuch as I myself am alone suspected by the Taborites of being in any way associated with the leaders of the royalist party.'

'And there will be no brighter ornament about the court of her majesty than your ladyship,' said the baron. 'Judging by the enthusiasm with which the aristocracy of the southern districts of Bohemia have proclaimed their adhesion to the royal cause, we shall soon be in a condition to assume the offensive, instead of acting merely upon the defensive.'

'I have already learnt that your lordship has been invested with the chief command of the queen's army,' said the Baroness Hamelen; 'and I congratulate your lordship and the friends of the cause generally upon that nomination. I have likewise heard that her majesty has been pleased to accept the suit of your lordship's son; and upon that event I likewise offer my felicitations.'

The baron and Lord Rodolph made suitable acknowledgments for these complimentary expressions; but the Marquis of Schomberg could not for an instant repel the cloud which gathered over his countenance as he listened to the language addressed by his mistress to one whom he now regarded as a successful rival. The keen eyes of Father Cyprian were fixed upon him; and in the transitory expression which thus swept over the features of the marquis, the wily monk read the confirmation of all his previously-conceived suspicions.

The banquet continued with as much

joyousness and fervor as on the preceding evening; but the ladies, exhausted with the amusements of the day, retired at an earlier hour. The Baroness Hamelen was one of the first thus to withdraw; and immediately after she quitted the hall, the Carthusian priest followed her.

Overtaking the baroness in one of the corridors leading to the sleeping apartments, the monk inquired whether she had stated the real cause of her precipitate flight from Prague, or whether there were any other reason which she did not choose to proclaim in the presence of the assembled guests. But the lady reassured him on that head, adding, however that the Taborites were making immense and rapid preparations for the war which John Zitzka had of his own accord first declared against the Bohemian aristocracy.

'Having journeyed with a speed which has well nigh exhausted me,' said the baroness, 'I must at once court the repose that I so deeply need; but to-morrow, holy father, we shall find an opportunity of conversing together upon the various matters which regard our projects and our position.'

'Yes—for I have many and strange things to relate to your ladyship,' observed the Carthusian; 'especially concerning Sister Marietta.'

'To-morrow, then,' said the baroness, 'we will have a long conference together.'

Thus speaking, the noble parted from the priest and hurried through the passage towards the chamber prepared for her accommodation.

As she thus sped along the corridor, she felt in the bosom of her dress to assure herself that a certain document was safe; but, having convinced herself that it was, she did not notice that in withdrawing her hand the valued and important paper fell upon the floor.

Another instant, and she was in her chamber, where, overcome with weariness, she hastily laid aside her garments and sought her couch. Nor did she perceive that she had lost the document concerning which she had proved so anxious a few minutes before.

But the Carthusian, who had lingered in the passage in a mood of momentary thoughtfulness, beheld the paper upon the floor; and, picking it up, he proceeded to his own apartment to examine its contents.

Then, to his unbounded amazement, he perused the following words:—

"Memorandum of Guarantee to her ladyship the Baroness Hamelen, in recognition of her promise and spontaneous undertaking to deliver the Princess Elizabetha and her treasures into my hands: the annexed conditions to hold only in the event of such promise and undertaking being duly fulfilled by the Baroness Hamelen.

1. To abstain from placing any garrison in Hamelen Castle.

2. To confirm her ladyship in the possession of her houses, domains, and estates, under any circumstances that may arise.

3. To accord her ladyship a full and complete pardon for all the intrigues, machinations, or schemes she may have been heretofore engaged in.

4. To extend the conditions of the third article to a certain nobleman whom she may name hereafter.

"JOHN ZITZKA."

A diabolical expression of countenance distorted the features of the Carthusian as he read this damning proof of the lady's treachery.

An entirely new light was now suddenly thrown upon the motives of her visit to Altendorf Castle; and the priest had no difficulty in comprehending that she purposed to make the Marquis of Schomberg the accomplice of her designs, and the partaker of the amnesty which she had secured for herself. Yes, it was for the behoof of this nobleman that the fourth article of the guarantee was specially framed; and when the Carthusian recollected his suspicions with regard to the marquis, and the confirmation they had received at the banquetting-table, he entertained no doubt that his lordship would gladly fall into the views of his paramour.

Without losing many minutes in meditation upon this important discovery, the priest at once sent a message by a page soliciting a brief and private interview with the Baron of Altendorf. This nobleman accordingly hastened to the Carthusian's chamber; and he was thunderstruck upon perusing the document which the priest instaneously put into his hand.

'Had I not received this proof of the vile woman's perfidy, I should not have put faith in any one who might have asserted it,' said the baron, at length recovering from the consternation of surprise into which he had been thrown. 'But what is to be done? She evidently relies upon her influence over the

handmaidens in attendance on Elizabetha, and likewise on the devotion of a large number of the servitors of the Bronze Statue. By their connivance and aid she could indeed accomplish her perfidious designs; and the royal cause would be lost beyond redemption. What can we do, holy father? what plan do you suggest?'

'There is but one course to adopt,' said the priest, in a gloomy tone.

'And that course?' demanded the baron, looking into the depths of the Carthusian's eyes to read the response which he expected to his question.

'The Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss,' was the appallingly significant reply.

The baron started, although he had expected the answer.

'There is no alternative,' continued the Carthusian, in the same moody voice and manner. 'That woman has sold us to Zitzka, and must be punished. We must either do this, or allow her to continue her machinations while we compass to defeat them. It then becomes a struggle of artifice against artifice; and in the chapter of accidents *we* might be defeated. What mercy would then be shown to us?'

'None,' answered the baron. 'Yes, she must die. But how came that document in your possesssion?'

'She dropped it accidentally as she was proceeding to her chamber,' replied the priest; 'and I picked it up.'

'Perhaps she has already missed it?' exclaimed the baron, 'In this case she may become alarmed and secretly leave the castle.'

''Tis for you to give orders that no one shall issue forth without the password,' interrupted the Carthusian.—'See that the banquet be over by midnight, and ere the clock strikes one the three executioners shall repair to the chamber of the baroness, to convey her thence to the hall of the Bronze Statue.'

'Be it as you say,' observed the baron. 'And the Marquis of Schomberg ——'

'I shall keep a watch upon the corridor leading to the apartment of the baroness,' said the priest. 'As yet I am certain that she has had no opportunity of making any private communication to the marquis; and he is therefore ignorant of her perfidious compact with Zitzka, and the share she intends his lordship to take in the transaction. If he continues thus ignorant, he may live. But should he seek her apartment——'

''Tis scarcely possible that he knows where it is situated,' interrupted the baron; 'seeing that they had no opportunity of conversing together in a private manner at the banquet.'

'Oh! an artful woman finds an opportunity for so hasty and brief a whisper as was alone required for such an intimation,' returned the priest. 'If, then, as I was saying, the marquis should seek the chamber of the baroness this night, and remain with her in conversation,—should he, in a word, become acquainted with the projects of that treacherous creature,—*then he also must perish!* For in the present state of his discontented mind, it would be sufficient for him to know that there *does* exist a means of treating with Zitzka, and saving himself by the sacrifice of his friends, in order to induce him to enter into negotiations with the Taborite General. Therefore, as I before observed, if the marquis should have any communication with the baroness this night, he must undergo the same fate. 'Tis now half-past ten,' added the priest, glancing at a water-clock which stood upon a shelf in the apartment; 'at one your lordship will meet me here again, attended by the three executioners.'

The baron spoke an assent, and hastily quitted the priest's chamber.

The Carthusian then proceeded to the corridor whence the apartment of the Baroness Hamelen opened; and, concealing himself in a secluded nook, he anxiously watched the door of her room.

In about half an hour the faint light shed by a lamp suspended to the ceiling was obscured by the shadow of a man passing along the corridor; and the priest from his hiding-place recognized the tall form of the Marquis of Schomberg.

Cautiously did the nobleman advance, counting all the doors on his right hand, and when he reached the seventh, he gently opened it and entered the chamber with which it communicated.

''Tis as I suspected,' muttered the Carthusian to himself, as he emerged from his hiding-place; then, as he crept back to his own apartment, he said with a low triumphant chuckle, 'Two victims this night for the Virgin's Kiss!'

———

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE WHITE LADY AND THE TWO PAGES.

DESCEND we now into those subterraneans to which the reader has already been introduced more than once, and with which so many wild and awful mysteries are associated.

It was about eleven o'clock on the same night when the incidents just related took place, and just about the time when the priest beheld the Marquis of Schomberg enter the chamber of the Baroness Hamelen, that the White Lady issued from that large underground room where Lionel and Konrad had been enrolled amongst the number of those occupying that mournful habitation.

The Carmelite carried a lamp in her hand; and she was followed by the two pages, who wore dark funeral garments. The countenances of these unfortunate youths were pale and care-worn; their cheeks were sunken, the bloom of vigorous health had fled, and their eyes had lost the fire which was wont to animate them. An expression of profound melancholy sate upon their features, the pallor of which was thrown out with corpse-like effect by the sable apparel that clothed their forms and the cowls that were thrown over the back part of their heads.

The White Lady was as pale as we have before described her; and her countenance bore still deeper traces of sorrow than ever. This mournful expression was now blended with a cruel anxiety and an evident uneasiness which bespoke some recent or present cause of annoyance; and her blue eyes, usually so mild in their looks, shone with the glitter of the soul's restlessness.

Closing the huge massive door which fitted so well into the wall, the pages followed the lady as she led the way through the circular chamber into the hall of the Bronze Statue; and the youths cast shuddering and horrified looks upon that magnificent image which shone in the lamp-light with the mellowed and subdued lustre of burnished gold. For the secret of that awful engine of punishment was now known to them; and they were shaken with terror to the inmost confines of their whole being as its presence brought vividly back to their minds the frightful death from which they had been so providentially delivered about ten days previously.

And this reflection likewise recalled to their memories the incalculable debt of gratitude which they owed to the White Lady; and as she hurried them through the chamber of the Bronze Statue, Lionel said in a tone of deep feeling, 'Pardon us, thou kind benefactress, if we have grown restless and life-weary in the captivity to which our evil fortunes have doomed us!'

'Yes, pardon us, dear lady, I implore you,' added Konrad, 'but remember that we are so young—oh! so very young to be thus snatched away from the great world without—that world which possessed so many charms for us!'

'I cannot pardon you, poor youths, because you have given me no offence,' responded the Carmelite, in her low, plaintive, and musical voice which was now more than ordinarily tremulous. 'It is natural that you should pine in regret for that world whence you have been compelled to separate yourselves; and I pity you—deeply, deeply pity you, instead of experiencing the faintest sentiment of annoyance. Yes, my dear children, for such have you become to me; and whatever our destiny may still have in store for us, I shall always love you as if you were my own sons. For misfortune excites the kindliest sympathies in the human breast; and heaven knows that we have miseries enough to teach us to cling all the more lovingly to each other.'

'But are you not angry, lady, because we besought you ere now to permit us to quit the Hall of the Brotherhood, if it were only for a few minutes?' asked Lionel. 'Methinks that your countenance is less placid than usual; and it would break my heart were I the cause of enhancing the sorrows which your soul already experiences.'

'It is true, my dear youths,' answered the White Lady, 'that I am a prey to new and serious sources of affliction; but they have naught in connexion with the simple request which you made me just now, and to which I at once gave my assent. And speaking of that request, I do not wonder you should have made it. For although the numerous companions amongst whom your destiny has thrown you, have exerted themselves to the utmost to pour consolation into your souls, still must ye pant and pine for change of scene; and the monotony of the existence ye have led for the last ten days must seem terrible to your minds.'

'Alas! it is so, dear lady,' observed Lionel, tears rolling down his cheeks; 'and in order to escape even for a few instants only from that monotony, did we beseech you to permit us to wander through the subterraneans of this castle. You kindly assented to our prayer, and we thank you, lady—sincerely thank you.'

'But you are well aware, my poor boys,' resumed the Carmelite, 'that I could not suffer you to come forth alone and wander about these regions by yourselves. For at any moment may the servitors of the Bronze Statue make their appearance, either from the passages communicating with the chapel in the forest, or by means of other avenues leading up into the interior of the castle. Then, ignorant as you are of the various secret hiding-places, and the many hidden doors and labyrinthine ways of these subterraneans, detection would be inevitable, and I shudder to think of the consequences. For, were such an event to occur, and were *you*, whom the servitors believe to be dead, discovered to be alive, the result would prove fatal not only to yourselves, but to the entire brotherhood. Therefore, my dear youths, have I been compelled to accompany you in this mournful ramble which you are about to take; and at the first glimpse caught of a light in the distance—at the first sound of a door closing or a footstep advancing—shall I be at hand to hurry you away from danger into some hiding-place of security.'

'Is it often, then, that the myrmidons of the dread tribunal come hither?' asked Lionel.

'Not often, thank God!' exclaimed the White Lady, with a thrilling fervor, 'but no one can tell at what moment they may appear. Months and months frequently pass without giving up a new victim to the Statue, and without adding another to the community of brethren and sisters amongst whom we dwell.

'Oh! then you are not always able to rescue those whom the chiefs of the tribunal dedicate to destruction?' said Konrad, shuddering from head to foot.

'Alas! not always,' replied the lady, in a tone of the deepest sorrow.—'Sometimes the Carthusian priest superintends the execution, sometimes the Baron of Altendorf himself,' she continued, in a voice that became scarcely audible with extreme tremulousness; 'and in those cases the humanity of Hubert is unavailing. Fortunate, therefore, was it for you, dear boys, that the priest came not hither with you, when you were brought into this place of terror and of death. Had he come, naught could have saved you. The good old steward would not have dared to raise a hand nor utter a word in your behalf, and the three executioners must have done their duty. Oh! is it not horrible—horrible?'

'The brain reels beneath the idea,' murmured Lionel, to whom Konrad clung with the terror that came over him.

'Horrible! yes, it is most horrible!' repeated the White Lady. 'Those three brothers to whom I have alluded, and whom ye know to be men of humane dispositions and good hearts, were themselves doomed to the vengeance of the Bronze Statue some twelve or thirteen years ago. But it happened at the time that executioners were wanted by the chiefs of the tribunal, and those men saved their lives on the fearful condition that they should fill the hideous avocations which were then vacant.'

'And is there no hope, lady, that a time will come when God's vengeance or man's despair will strike a death-blow at this awful tribunal?' demanded Konrad.

'Methinks that the time of which you speak cannot be far distant,' was the cheering response. 'From all that I have heard within the last two days, Bohemia stands upon the verge of a terrible crisis; and in the convulsion which is at hand, God send that the Bronze Statue may be overthrown! For the mighty Zitzka has proclaimed war against the aristocracy, and the aristocracy have thrown down the gauntlet likewise on their side. This castle has become the head-quarters of the royalist rebellion, and the palatial abode of the new queen; and it is more than probable that Zitzka will lose no time in marching hither, and laying siege to Altendorf Castle. Then—oh! then——'

'God grant that he may triumph!' ejaculated Konrad, fervently.

'Such also is my prayer!' said Lionel, with equal enthusiasm. 'And should victory proclaim itself in favor of the Taborite General, may he wreak a deadly vengeance upon the Carthusian priest, the Baron of Altendorf——'

'Hush!' cried the lady, starting abruptly from a profound reverie into

which she had fallen during the previous few moments. 'Though you yourselves are persecuted, dream not of vengeance,' she added, in a tone of deep solemnity, and which imparted to her words the appearance of a remonstrance. 'You are not unacquainted with the lamentable truth that amongst your companions in captivity there are men and women—aye, great men and noble ladies—who have lingered for years in that monotonous imprisonment, and yet no word of bitterness escapes their lips. And why is this forbearance shown? why is this Christian feeling manifested? Because I have tutored them to leave vengeance to Him to whom it alone belongs, and not aspire to grasp the thunderbolt which He alone may wield.'

'Pardon us, dear lady once again, pardon us,' exclaimed Lionel, 'if we have said aught that gave thee pain, or made thee think less favorably of us.'

'Once more I assure you that I have nothing to pardon,' answered the Carmelite; 'because I commisserate your unhappy lot too deeply not to be ready to make all possible allowances for you. And when I ask you to think of me and of my wretched fate—when I remind you that twenty years have now elapsed since I first became an inmate of these subterraneans, and that in the beginning I was alone—yes, *alone* in that gloomy apartment, where now upwards of fifty individuals daily meet to thank God for having saved their lives, and to partake of the bread which his bounty sends them,—when I tell you that I have known more anguish, more sorrow, more terror, more affliction, than all those fifty persons have together experienced,—then, my dear young boys, I may in confidence implore you to bear your own doom with resignation, and cast aside all dreams and hopes of vengeance.'

'Admirable woman!' exclaimed Lionel, 'an angel speaks in your voice and with your tongue! You not only save our lives upon earth,—but you teach us how to save our souls for hereafter! And, oh! it grieves me, deeply, profoundly grieves me to know that you have fresh misfortunes weighing upon your mind! Indeed, ever since Hubert visited the subterraneans this morning and had a private conference with you, methought that a deeper gloom had settled upon your countenance, that a sadder expression had fastened upon your features——'

'Such is indeed the case, my young friend,' interrupted the lady, 'but I pray you not to dwell upon that subject. Suffice it for you to know that the impending calamity of which I received the tidings this morning, regards myself alone and menaces not the little community of which you and Konrad form a part. And now let me conduct you down into the place of tombs.'

The preceding conversation had commenced in the hall of the Statue, from which place the Carmelite had led the way into the little chamber already described as the workshop, and so denominated. There the lady and her two young companions had paused to continue the discourse; and now they descended the granite staircase into the chamber of the machinery. Past this frightful engine did the lady hurry on, purposely shading the lamp in such a manner that the beams should not fall fully upon the vast cylinders bristling with the countless knives; for, although she was aware that the pages had already seen that tremendous spectacle, she was loath to torture their souls by allowing them leisure to take another survey.

Into the vast vaulted cemetery did the White Lady conduct the youths; and the first tomb to which she directed their special attention was the one bearing the inscription dedicated to the Baroness Ermenonda of Altendorf.

'Was this the wife of the present baron?' asked Lionel, his looks wandering from the brazen epitaph and settling upon the sculptured figure of black marble that reposed upon the tomb.

The Carmelite answered in the affirmative; but her voice was low, tremulous, and scarcely audible.

'His lordship must have been deeply attached to her,' observed Konrad, 'for the inscription is couched in the most affectionate terms. It says that *she was snatched away in the spring-tide of her youth and the glory of her beauty, from a husband by whom she was loved most tenderly*. Yes, he must have loved her well,' added Konrad, in a musing tone, 'and yet his heart is made of iron, or else were it impossible for him to retain the chieftainship of that terrible tribunal——'

'Come,' suddenly interrupted the White Lady, 'and let me show you other tombs well worthy of your notice on account of their sculptural beauty and architectural richness.'

Thus speaking, the Carmelite led the

way through that mighty resting-place of the departed; and upwards of an hour and a half were expended in wandering amidst the tombs. No interruption was experienced by the little party, no intrusive footstep raised an echo in the vast cemetery.

At length the White Lady observed that it must be very late; indeed, judging by the time which had elapsed during this ramble in the subterraneans, she calculated that it was close upon one o'clock in the morning. But as she was retracing her steps, followed by the two pages, her eyes caught a glimpse of some dark object which was lying between two monuments and which she had overlooked when ere now passing up the avenue. She paused, and threw the light of the lamp upon the object which had thus attracted her attention, when, to the mingled surprise and terror of herself and the two pages, it proved to be a coffin!

Yes—a handsome coffin, covered with black velvet and studded with silver nails!

There was no plate upon the lid—no inscription of any kind; it was evidently quite new, and nothing of a pestiferous nor fetid nature exhaled therefrom.

'What can be the meaning of this?' said the White Lady, speaking audibly, but in a musing tone. 'No death has taken place lately in this Castle: and even if there were, it is not usual to deposit the remains of the dead in this place otherwise than in the vaults purposely opened for their reception. What can it mean?"

Then prompted by an undefinable and likewise an irresistible impulse of curiosity, the Carmelite stooped down—loosened the hook which, according to the usage of the times, was the only fastening bestowed upon coffins—and raised the lid, which opened like a door. A winding sheet appeared:—but, instead of leaving bare the countenance of a corpse, it stretched completely over the hollow of the coffin. Still impelled by that invincible feeling for which she could not account, the White Lady drew aside the snowy linen, but with trembling hand and respectful looks; and now the lustre of the lamp, instead of flinging its beams upon the marble face of the dead, was reflected in a vast accumulation of gold coins, rich jewels, splendid ornaments, and massive pieces of plate!

Surprised and dazzled by a spectacle so little anticipated, the lady and the two pages were for some minutes lost in the contemplation of this enormous wealth; and again did the Carmelite, after a long pause, put to herself the question—"What can it mean?"

Then, as the thought flashed to her mind that the new Queen of Bohemia was an inmate of Altendorf Castle, she judged that the treasure might, perhaps belong to her; and conceiving that she had thus discovered the solution of the enigma, she hastened to close the coffin.

"Now let us retrace our way, my young friends," she said; and, followed by the two pages, the Carmelite returned along the principal avenue of the subterranean cemetry towards the chamber of the machinery, which, as the reader is already aware, it was necessary to traverse in order to regain the dwelling-place of the brotherhood.

But just as they were entering the place where the hideous mechanism stood, with the trap door above the mighty cylinders and the rapid streamlet gurgling beneath, just as they crossed the threshold of the door leading from the cemetry into that stone chamber of the ghastly machinery, the loud hollow din of a bell struck suddenly upon their ears.

'Twas a single stroke, like the first solemn note of a death-knell: and the White Lady, who knew its tremendous meaning and comprehended the awful warning which it conveyed, gave vent to an ejaculation of indescribable anguish!

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE.

We must now return to the chamber occupied by the Baroness Hamelen.

Believing himself to be totally unobserved,—indeed, little suspecting that the Carthusian priest had lain upon the watch, and equally far from anticipating the tremendous mischief which was brewing, the Marquis of Schomberg entered the apartment where his mistress was sleeping.

Carefully closing the door behind him, he advanced towards the couch; and on observing that the Baroness was wrapt in a profound slumber, his first impulse was to retire. But remembering that in the midst of the banquet she had found an opportunity to whisper in his ears a few words to the effect that

she desired to speak with him upon matters of the most urgent importance, and that this intimation was followed by a rapid description of the exact whereabouts of her apartment,—remembering all this, we say, the Marquis thought he should be acting prudently to awake her. Moreover, her sudden and most unexpected arrival at Altendorf Castle had filled him with a vague misgiving that some other motive than the one she had alleged was at the bottom of this precipitate flight from the capital. He was therefore anxious to learn the truth upon that point; and thus, after a few minutes' hesitation and reflection, he decided upon arousing the sleeping Baroness.

Placing his hand upon the shoulder which lay exposed and which was of dazzling whiteness, he shook her gently. She started—and, opening her eyes, threw a terrified glance around. But observing, by the light of the lamp which she had left burning on the table, that it was the Marquis of Schomberg who had disturbed her, she instantly called up a smile to her handsome features; and taking his hand she pressed it affectionately to her bosom, exclaiming, 'Oh! I thank you for thus arousing me at this moment!"

'And wherefore should you thank me?' inquired the Marquis: 'unless it be that you have important communications to make,' he added in a tone indicative of anxiety and suspense.

'I thank you,' responded the Baroness, raising herself partially up in the couch, so that her elbow rested upon the pillow and her hand supported her head,—'I thank you because I was just entering upon the details of a horrible dream; and you have therefore relieved me from sufferings which would be dreadful even in a vision.'

'And those sufferings?' said the Marquis, interrogatively.

'Were the ordeal of the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss,' replied the Baroness, shuddering at the bare idea.

'Oh! do not give way to such horrible thoughts,' exclaimed the Marquis, a strange sensation of uneasiness, and for which he could not account, stealing over him like a presentiment of evil.

'Nay—I could not control the train of ideas which took possession of me in my slumber,' said Lady Hamelen; 'but, God be thanked! your timely arrival cut them short.'

''Tis said that some dreams come as a warning, and that all have some foundation for them,' observed the Marquis, battling within himself to shake off that growing feeling of uneasiness which became alike painful and alarming. 'Surely you have done naught to incur the vengeance of that tribunal whereof you and I are alike influential members? —surely this precipitate flight from Prague and unexpected arrival at Altendorf Castle can have no ulterior aim, beyond anything with which I am already acquainted or can easily guess?'

'Indeed, my dear Marquis,' responded the lady, assuming a serious air and lowering her voice to a whisper,—'indeed I *have* ulterior aims, and you must become my accomplice!'

'What mean you?' demanded the Lord of Schomberg, almost frightened by the mystery of her words and the solemnity of her manner. 'Speak, I conjure you!'

'Wherefore this excitement?' asked the Baroness, surveying him with amazement. 'Has anything occurred to vex or alarm *you?* Oh! I understand it all!' she immediately cried: 'you are hurt at the appointment of the Baron of Altendorf to the command of the royal forces?—and you have reason to feel that your pride is thus wounded.'

'Yes—I am indeed hurt in that respect,' replied the Marquis; 'and I was somewhat surprised that you were so cordial in the congratulations which you offered my successful rival ere now at the banquetting-table.'

'When treachery is intended,' said the Baroness, 'the tongue must frame honied compliments to throw men off their guard. Such was my case,' she added, fixing her eyes upon the Marquis to ascertain the effect which these words would produce upon him.

'Treachery!' he exclaimed 'Is it possible that I have heard aright? or do mine ears deceive me?'

'You are *not* deceived,' said the baroness, 'and you have now an opportunity of being avenged upon your successful rival—aye, and on the Carthusian priest whom you have ever secretly abhorred.'

'In the name of the blessed Virgin, be explicit!' cried the marquis. 'Do you know that suspense is torturing me cruelly? I see that you have grave and momentous intelligence to communicate; and, for the first time in my life, I am trembling all over with a vague and unaccountable terror, as if a presentiment of evil had seized upon my heart. As for vengeance against the

Baron of Altendorf, who has crowned himself with honors which were legitimately and deservedly mine—show me how I may humble and baffle that proud peer, and I shall not be tardy in carrying the means into execution.'

'Know, then, in a few words,' replied the baroness, 'that I have formed a certain compact with John Zitzka——'

'A compact with John Zitzka!' ejaculated the marquis, in indescribable amazement. 'Is this possible? or has something occurred to deprive you of your senses and plunge you into the world of dreams?'

'I have neither lost my senses, nor am I dreaming,' said the baroness.—'Tis true that, overpowered by weariness, I sought my couch and yielded to the advance of slumber, notwithstanding that I had given you an appointment to come hither this night. But you must not suppose that on this account I underrate the importance of the step I have taken.'

'And that step?' demanded the nobleman, eagerly.

'I will hasten to explain myself fully, proceeded the baroness. 'Many circumstances have convinced me that the power of John Zitzka is greater than our party had previously conceived, great though that power was admitted to be. But the review which took place so recently at Prague served to convince me that the Taborites enjoy the sympathies of the masses, and that the entire population, with the exception of the aristocracy and their feudal retainers, will rise in support of Zitzka. Under these convictions, I fancied that it was time to save myself—time also to save *you*. For this purpose I sought the Captain-General in the Castle of Prague, I obtained an interview with him, our discourse was long and serious, and we parted with a mutual understanding.'

'And that understanding?' exclaimed the marquis, inquiringly.

'First let me explain how it will affect yourself and me,' said the baroness. 'John Zitzka agrees and gives his guarantee that no garrison shall occupy my domains, that my possessions shall remain untouched and inalienably mine own, under any social or territorial changes that may be made; that a full pardon shall be granted me for all the past, and that the same benefit shall be extended to a certain nobleman whom I am yet to name.'

'And that nobleman is myself?' said the marquis, in a musing tone.

'Yes; and now what think you of the terms to which the Taborite chieftain has bound himself?' asked the Lady Hamelen.

'That they are excellent if *he* should prove the victor in the coming strife,' returned the marquis, 'but that certain death will be the reward of our treachery if the royal cause should eventuate in success.'

'The royal cause will be ruined by the very proceeding which I am bound to adopt in order to fulfil *my* share of the compact,' said the baroness. 'In a word, I have undertaken to deliver the Princess, or the Queen, as she is now called, and her treasures into the hands of John Zitzka.'

'Oh! but this is fearful!' exclaimed the marquis, springing from his seat by the bed-side of his mistress.

'Consider our position if the Taborites should prove successful in the civil war,' urged the baroness; 'and that they *will* succeed, I entertain not the slightest doubt. Then, what awaits us? Flight from our native land—ruin—utter ruin—perhaps poverty in a foreign clime——'

'Yes, yes—I understand it all, and I likewise dread it all!' exclaimed the marquis, pacing the room with agitated steps. 'The alternatives are bewildering——'

'But have you no vengeance to gratify?' demanded Lady Hamelen.

'Vengeance! Ah! now you have again touched a chord which vibrates to my very heart's core!' said the marquis, stopping short and fixing his eyes with a peculiar expression upon his paramor. 'Yes, I have indeed a ferocious hatred to appease: inasmuch as the proud Baron of Altendorf has heaped disgrace upon the head of the Marquis of Schomberg. Be it so, then; I yield—I consent! Yes, I am your accomplice in this tremendous treachery—your companion in this black iniquity. But, oh! small marvel was it that your dreams should have been haunted by visions of the Bronze Statue, since your waking thoughts had previously been intent upon so much perfidy! And now, tell me by what means you propose to carry your plans into execution?' said the nobleman, as he reseated himself by the side of the lady's couch.

'Our course is comparatively easy,' replied the baroness. 'The handmaidens new in attendance upon the queen,

are devoted to me. Acting in pursuance of the instructions which I shall give them, they will affect to sympathise with her majesty; and they will propose to aid her in escaping to the Court of Austria, whither I am well aware that in her heart she longs to flee. By their connivance and succor she will quit the castle: and those men whom the handmaidens will pretend to have gained over to her secret interests, and whom they will present as the volunteering protectors and companions of her flight, will conduct her back to Prague. *There*, she will be handed over to the custody of John Zitzka.'

'Thus far your scheme is well planned,' observed the nobleman. 'And now in respect to the treasure?'

'You are well aware that when it was originally determined at the White Mansion to convey that treasure in the coffin to this castle,' resumed Lady Hamelen, 'the Baron of Altendorf intimated that it should be concealed in the subterranean vaults of his mighty fortalice.'

'And this resolution has been adhered to,' remarked the Lord of Schomberg. 'The coffin containing the treasure was deposited in the vaults immediately after the arrival of the funereal procession, which served as a mask and a disguise during its progress along the great highway.'

'Then the removal of that coffin to Prague becomes a comparatively easy matter,' said the baroness; 'for nine-tenths of the sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue are devoted to me, and they will blindly obey all the instructions which I may give them.'

'Yes, you may rely upon them,' observed the marquis. 'But granting that all this turns out as you anticipate, how know you that John Zitzka will keep his word?'

'Because he is an honorable man,' responded the baroness, emphatically; 'and because he has given me a written guarantee whereunto his sign-manual is attached.'

'Show me that document,' exclaimed the marquis, eagerly.

'Within the bosom of my dress there is a double plait in the form of a diminutive pocket,' said the baroness; 'and you will find the guarantee securely treasured there.'

The marquis rose from his seat by the couch of his mistress and advanced to the chair over the back of which she had hastily thrown her apparel. But vainly did he examine the corsage of the rich velvet robe—the document was not there!

'I cannot find your paper,' he said, turning towards the baroness, and viewing her with mingled suspicion and alarm.

'Not find it!' she ejaculated, becoming deadly pale; and springing from the couch, she proceeded to search for the document with trembling hands and fevered looks. "Great heaven! it is lost—it is lost—and I am undone!' she cried at the expiration of a few moments; and clasping her hands frantically, she sank down upon her knees beneath the weight of an appalling consternation.

The marquis was also petrified by a kindred terror; and they looked at each other with an awe and an excruciating alarm mutually felt. Motionless,—frozen,—chilled as with a presentiment of approaching death, did they thus remain gazing in speechless horror upon each other for more than a minute.

At length that paralysis which held them as if annihilated, was broken all on a sudden; and throwing themselves into each other's arms, their rending anguish escaped in piteous lamentations and tears.

'I am undone, I am undone!' groaned the wretched woman, tearing herself from the embrace of her lover and wringing her hands. 'Oh! would to God that I had never conceived the thought of this treachery!'

'And I likewise am undone,' said the equally miserable marquis, 'for it is impossible that I can be regarded otherwise than as your accomplice in this projected perfidy.'

'No, you at least are innocent!' cried the baroness, shuddering all over with torturing apprehension on account of herself.

'Delude me not with vain and futile hope!' exclaimed the nobleman, terribly excited. 'You say that the guarantee contains a stipulation in behalf of a certain nobleman to be hereafter named by yourself? Now, will not this clause point to me? will it not prove fatal to me? And think you that if that paper has found its way into the hands of those who possess the power,—aye, and the inclination to punish,—think you that a watch has not been even already set upon *your* movements and *mine*, and that my presence in your chamber at this hour, when you have just arrived wearied and exhausted

from a long journey, will not be taken as a damning evidence of the fact of a secret understanding between us?'

'God forbid that my rashness—my folly—my madness should compromise you!' exclaimed the wretched woman. 'But what time is it now, think you?' she demanded in a hurried, anxious tone.

'It was eleven when I entered your room,' replied the Marquis; 'and nearly two hours must have elapsed since then. But wherefore this question?'

'Because it was only ten o'clock when I retired from the banquetting-hall,' was the instantaneous response; 'and *then* the paper was secure and safe in my possession. Indeed, I well remember ascertaining that fact while threading the corridor leading hither.'

'Then perhaps you dropped it in the corridor,' said the Marquis, catching at she hope as a drowning-man clutches a straw: 'and it may still be there.'

'God grant that it may!' cried the baroness' seizing with avidity upon the same slender thread of hope.

And while she was yet giving fervid utterance to that ejaculation, the marquis hastened to the door, in order to rush forth into the passage and search for that document, on the finding or loss of which life and death now seemed inevitably to depend.

But the door was fastened on the outside!

'God have mercy upon us!' exclaimed the nobleman, staggering back towards his paramor, who had once again sunk upon her knees in an agony of terror the instant she perceived that egress was thus barred.

'Oh! to escape—to escape!' she cried, wringing her hands; and starting to her feet, she hastily began to throw on her apparel.

The marquis rushed to the window, but the silver beams of the moon irradiated the moat which lay beneath, and all hope of flight in that quarter was destroyed in an instant.

'Lost—lost—irretrievably lost!' murmured the miserable man, sinking upon a seat, while a cold perspiration started forth from every pore, and his countenance became ghastly with the expression of horror that settled upon it.—'Death—death—death is our portion; and, O God! what a death!'

Then, covering his face with his hands, he remained silent, motionless, paralyzed with dumb despair!

Meantime the baroness, though in a state of poignant excitement, had resumed her apparel, or rather had thrown it disorderly upon her person; and she had just completed her rapid task, when the door was suddenly burst open.

The Marquis of Schomberg sprang to his feet and drew his sword, with the determination of selling his life as dearly as possible: but half-a-dozen of the sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue rushed into the room, precipitated themselves upon the desperate nobleman, and overpowered him in an instant. A gag was thrust between his teeth, his arms were pinioned, and he remained, overwhelmed with terror, in the hands of the myrmidons of that tremendous tribunal, whose mysteries were no secret to him.

At the same time the three executioners, enveloped in their long black cloaks, and with the cowls drawn just so far over their heads as to shade their faces, seized upon the Baroness Hamelen, gagged her in a moment, and began to hurry her away from the chamber.

In the corridor outside, the Carthusian and the Baron of Altendorf were waiting, attended by Hubert, who carried a lamp in his hand.

A stern and even savage resolution sate upon the features of Father Cyprian; the baron was cold and gloomy; but the venerable steward was ghastly pale, and trembled from head to foot.

Along the corridor was the wretched woman hurried by the three executioners; a private staircase was descended, and at the bottom a door opened into the castle chapel. This sacred place was traversed with rapid steps, Hubert leading the way; and another door, opening behind the altar-screen, revealed a flight of stone steps, conducting down into utter darkness.

Despite of her furious struggles and desperate exertions to escape, the wretched baroness was dragged down that staircase. Several winding passages and vaulted corridors were then threaded, the echoes reverberating gloomily with the footsteps of the party, and at length the circular chamber was reached.

There the miserable woman was ordered to kneel upon the granite block, and make her peace with heaven.

Numbed in limb and stupified in sense with the appalling consternation which was upon her, the baroness obeyed mechanically; and fixing her eyes with a species of vacant terror upon the cruci-

fix, she joined her hands in the listlessness of a crushing despair.

Then arose the voice of Father Cyprian, echoing with sepulchral intonation through the circular chapel and in the adjacent corridor; and when he had repeated a short prayer, invoking heaven's mercy upon the soul of the woman who was about to die, the three executioners once more seized upon their victim.

And at the same instant that Hubert lighted the way into the hall of the Bronze Statue, the Marquis of Schomberg was dragged from the opposite door into the circular chapel.

More dead than alive, was the Baroness Hamelen borne into the place where the colossal image of the Virgin stood; but the instant that the beams of Hubert's lamp fell upon the burnished surface of that statue, which was alike so beautiful and so terrible, the unhappy woman seemed to be suddenly inspired with all that poignant anguish of feeling which sprang from a heart in whose core a death wound was already inflicted!

The gag fell from her mouth, and a piercing, rending scream burst from her lips, as the Bronze Statue slowly stood out of the distant obscurity and developed its outlines and its shape to her horrified view.

Writhing desperately in the grasp of the executioners, she turned towards them to implore their mercy,—to beseech them to loosen their hold upon her.

Their cowls were now thrown back; and the baroness, struck by the mild and melancholy expression of those countenances which she had expected to find pitiless and ferocious, was inspired by a gleam of hope that she might yet be able to move the hearts of these men to mercy.

But while this idea was yet traversing her brain, some undefinable chain of associations brought back to her recollection the features of the three executioners; the deeds of the past, so far as *they* were concerned, flashed on the instant to her memory; and, changed though they were by sorrow and the lapse of years, she recognized the Brothers Schwartz!

Then upon her lip died the prayer which she was about to put forth to them in appeal for mercy; and as a fearful moan burst from her tongue instead, she was hurried onward into the presence of the Bronze Statue.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE VIRGIN'S KISS.

And now for the first time in her life did the Baroness Hamelen stand face to face before that image of which she had heard so much, of the terrible mysteries of which she was so well aware,—and which gave its name to the tremendous tribunal whereof she had long been one of the most influential members.

Casting upon the statue a look full of unutterable horror, she threw herself back and seemed to bend beneath the calm and placid expression of countenance which the modeller's exquisite art had given to the Virgin; but then she knew—alas! too well knew, that in proportion as the aspect of the image was benignant, mild, and merciful, the punishment of which it was in reality the accursed engine, was atrocious, horrible and pitiless.

Writhing with mortal agony in the grasp of the three executioners, and giving vent to the most piercing screams, the miserable woman appeared to be suddenly animated with the strength of a giantess; and carrying the Brothers Schwartz back with her a few paces in her desperate struggle to escape from their power, she besought the old steward to have mercy upon her,—to save her,—to suffer her to escape!

The ghastly features of the trembling Hubert were illumed into a horrible expression by the flickering light of the lamp which he carried in his hand;—and he was about to give utterance to some ejaculation which rose to his lips, when turning his eyes suddenly towards the door opening from the circular chapel, he perceived that the Marquis of Schomberg was already *there*, kneeling upon the granite hassock, and attended by the Carthusian priest, the Baron of Altendorf, and the sworn servitors of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue. Then the words which the old man was about to utter, whatever they were, died upon his lip; and averting his looks from the baroness, he seemed to be praying fervently and silently as his trembling hand still held the light which threw its quivering beams on his pallid features now distorted with an indescribable horror.

Suddenly a bell sent forth a deep-toned sound, which appeared to come from some neighboring apartment and to be laden with all the funereal gloom

of those dreadful subterraneans. That single note of the death-knell boomed through the hall of the Bronze Statue; and the image itself seemed to quiver as its colossal form responded in metallic echo from its hollow interior.

'Twice again, lady, will the bell strike,' whispered one of the Brothers Schwartz, 'and at the third note you must meet your doom.'

The sound of the knell had struck upon the soul of the miserable woman with the numbness of a consternation, silencing her screams in a moment as if her tongue had grown palsied, and freezing the blood which an instant before had been boiling with the fiery heat of fever in her veins. But the mild, mournful, and even compassionate tone in which the eldest Schwartz had addressed that solemn warning to her ear, recalled her as it were to herself; and catching with eager avidity at the almost desperate hope thus inspired, she exclaimed in a voice of frenzied wildness, 'Spare me, spare me! My God! I am not prepared to perish thus suddenly; spare me, spare me!'

'We cannot!' answered the same executioner who had before spoken.—'Were we to refuse to perform our duty, our own lives would instantaneously pay the forfeit. Think not, however, that we throw into our present painful, wretched, horrible avocation, any spirit of revenge for the wrongs, the deep, irreparable, and unmerited wrongs, which we have suffered at your hands!'

'No—oh! no—God forbid!' murmured the second brother. 'We forgive you, unhappy woman—from the bottom of our hearts do we forgive you!'

'Yes, tremendous though your cruelty has been towards men who never by word nor deed offended *you*, lady,' added the third brother, 'we pardon, sincerely pardon you!'

A second time did the bell—the awful bell—sound with a hollow, booming din; and the iron note moaned with its oscillating metallic intonation throughout the vast subterraneans.

'O God! have mercy upon me!' murmured the wretched baroness, as she sank upon her knees, her head falling upon her bosom.

Then all was still—all was silent, for upwards of a minute; for in the circular chamber the Marquis of Schomberg was praying fervently but with voiceless lips, and only in the depths of his own harrowed soul. The Baron of Altendorf was surveying him with the grim satisfaction of a triumphant rival; the sworn servitors were standing motionless as statues around the unhappy nobleman who was to become the second victim to the Bronze Statue that night; and on the threshold of the hall of the colossal image the Carthusian was leaning against the door-post, with folded arms and with a fiendish expression of mingled malice and ferocious bloodthirstiness upon his countenance. Such was the aspect of the group which a lamp, borne by one of the servitors, threw into strong relief in the circular chamber, on the walls of which the shadows of those men in those several attitudes were ominously flung.

And the baroness—Oh! who can penetrate into all that was now passing in the mind of this wretched, wretched woman? But perhapt that mind had suddenly become a blank; for *there* she knelt motionless—silent—with her head upon her bosom; and the bosom itself gave no perceptible heavings.

Suddenly the bell—the bell of doom—sounded for the third time; and the instant that its note struck upon the ear of the fated woman, she sprang wildly up, like a corpse that is galvanized—her countenance livid and hideous, her features horribly convulsed, and her eyes glaring on the Statue with an expression of mingled anguish and terror that no pen can describe. She endeavored to speak; but not a word could she utter—not even to a scream or a moan could she give vent; and in another instant, when the executioners again fastened their hold upon her, all the frenzied wildness of her aspect subsided on a sudden—a numbness seized upon her—a film came over her eyes—the lamp, the men, the Statue all disappeared from her view, and she remained unconscious of existence!

'Administer restoratives!' exclaimed the Carthusian, speaking in a loud and commanding tone from the spot where he still kept his stand, 'It is not while in a swoon that a victim may be offered to the Bronze Statue! No, the agonies and tortures of that death must be felt in all their poignancy!'

One of the brothers Schwartz was accordingly compelled to pour a strong cordial down the throat of the baroness; and the miserable woman was almost instantly restored to life—or rather to the keen, horrible, and distracted consciousness of the tremendous agonies that were to mark the last and only re-

maining minute of her mortal existence!

For scarcely had her eyes opened to embrace at one rapid and affrighted glance all those features of the scene which stamped the hideous drama with so appalling a reality; and while a rending shriek of the intensest anguish wa still thrilling from her tongue, the executioners seized her in their arms, hurried her up to the Bronze Statue, and bade her receive the *Virgin's Kiss!*

Then followed immediately a scene at which the soul sickens—at which the crimson current stagnates as if frozen in the veins of the narrator—as if the cold influence of death itself were creeping over him from whom the exigencies of the tale wring these harrowing details!

For scarcely had the executioners brought the shrieking, screaming, struggling, agonising woman close up to the Bronze Statue, when that image appeared to be suddenly endowed with life; the arms, so placidly crossed over the chest, extended themselves slowly, thus unfolding in the manner of one who is about to embrace another; and the whole front part of the colossal image opened, like folding-doors, up as far as the neck.

But, O God! what a hideous aspect did the interior of the Statue present to the view of the baroness, as in those last few instants of her life she plunged her horrified, distracted looks into the awful engine of punishment. Two spikes stuck out from the back part, projecting in such a manner, and so arranged with a diabolical calculation of artistic nicety, that they would enter the eyes of the victim when folded in the Virgin's embrace; and all the inner surface of the image was studded with sharp-pointed blades to pierce the flesh in every part of the body.

The bell—the invisible bell—having paused for a few moments after striking the third time, had begun to ring with a continuous peal—its intonation no longer characterised with the deep hollowness which before had marked it, but now sounding with a clanging din that pierced through roof and wall, as the ponderous clapper struck sharply and quickly from side to side.

And while the piercing, rending shrieks of the almost frantic baroness mingled with that deafening peal, the three brothers Schwartz thrust her violently forward towards the interior of the Statue. Then the arms of the image suddenly folded over her neck, the doors of the Statue closed upon her, and, amidst the terrific yells that thrilled from her lips and the continuous clanging of the invisible bell, was she imprisoned within the body of the colossal effigy of the Virgin!

* * * * *
* * * *

The reader will remember that the White Lady and Sir Ernest de Colmar's two pages were just entering the chamber of the machinery when the din of the bell struck boomingly upon their ears.

The Carmelite had given vent to an ejaculation of indescribable anguish and horror as that terrific warning, so well known to her. rang through her brain; and, a sudden faintness immediately coming over her, she was sinking upon the earth when Lionel had the presence of mind to snatch the lamp from her hand, while Konrad prevented her from falling by receiving her in his arms.

A cold shivering ran visibly over the frame of the wretched lady; and her countenance had suddenly changed into an expression of unspeakable horror. She endeavored to utter a few words; but her tongue, cleaving to the roof of her mouth, refused to perform its office—and the pages, darting at each other looks full of mingled amazement and apprehension, knew not what to think of the appalling effect produced upon the lady by the sound of that bell.

A second time its iron voice boomed through the subterraneans, causing the machinery to oscillate in the chamber and arousing all the echoes in the neighboring place of tombs; and, with the suddenness of an inspiration, it flashed to the minds of the startled youths that the awful knell could have but one meaning, and that meaning was no longer difficult to conjecture!

'Let us fly hence! Back,—back to the cemetery!' exclaimed the White Lady, all on a sudden recovering her self-possession on account of the desperate impulse which urged her to flee from the contemplation of that hideous spectacle which every moment threatened to burst upon her horrified vision.

And snatching away the lamp from the hand of Lionel, she was about to rush from the chamber of the machinery; when, observing that the youths were transfixed with a dread horror, an awful curiosity, and a harrowing suspense, to the spot where they were standing, she paused to implore them

not to tarry a moment longer, but to follow her away from the place.

But they heard her not, saw her not, remembered her not; all their faculties, all their senses, all their ideas were absorbed in the one tremendous cause of that profound and terrible interest which enchained them. Dominated by this fearful sentiment, they were petrified, statue-like; no longer masters of themselves, they remained speechless and motionless, neither hearing the voice that implored them to fly, nor feeling the hand that strove to drag each of them in turn away from the coming scene of horror.

Thus was it that while the lady was still endeavoring, with an almost frenzied zeal and frantic despair, to induce them to hasten from the spot, the bell sounded a third time.

Then the Carmelite, staggering against the wall, seemed to lose all control over her own reason, her own feelings, her own inclinations. Still, however, she grasped the lamp, but it was only with a mechanical tenaciousness that she held it.

For by this time the rending shrieks of the baroness in the apartment above reached those who were stationed in the chamber below; and thus was it indeed too evident that a victim was about to be offered up to the vengeance of the Bronze Statue, and that victim a woman!

And now the bell began that continuous clang already described; and in a few moments the screams of the baroness became horrible to hear—for, as she was now inside the Statue, the thrilling notes of her mortal anguish penetrated more clearly through the wooden trap-door over which the colossal effigy stood. For the spikes had pierced her eyes, and the sharp blades had inflicted a thousand ghastly gashes upon her palpitating flesh—and still she lived!

But in a few moments the trap-door above the machinery opened of its own accord, or rather in obedience to the subtle mechanism, the infernal perfection and wondrous ingenuity of which guided this movement as well as all those displayed by the Bronze Statue itself; and through the aperture caused by the opening of the trap-door, the baroness fell from the interior of the colossal image upon the top of the machinery in the chamber beneath.

She was still living at the moment when she thus fell; but moans of excruciating anguish had superseded the screams a few instants before so rending. Blinded, wounded all over, and covered with blood, she fell between the two uppermost cylinders, while the dreadful bell still went clanging on.

Then round went those huge cylinders, so thickly studded with ghastly blades; round, round they went, set in motion first by the weight of the victim herself as she fell betwixt them, and then kept going with the stronger impulse added by the huge weight attached to the cords.

Upon the sharp blades had the wretched woman fallen; and there for an instant, a single instant, had she writhed horribly—horribly. But at the next moment, as already stated, round went the huge cylinders, the blades hacking, and hewing, and cutting her form to pieces—literally to pieces. Thus, at the very first revolution of the uppermost pair of cylinders, her agonies were ended, her life was extinguished, and her spirit had fled for ever!

But still those huge cylinders went rolling on, hacking, hewing, and cutting the still palpitating flesh with a horrible greediness, while large lumps of the mangled body fell upon the next pair of merciless drum-wheels; then, being still farther macerated there, the smaller fragments went down to the third pair; and, all the cylinders being in motion at the same time, the infernal process continued for upwards of a minute, until the entire body was minced into pieces, which fell into the babbling stream beneath and were borne away by the rapid current.

Such was the punishment of the Bronze Statue; such was the appalling nature of the Virgin's Kiss!

The bell had ceased—the trap-door had closed again—the water, a moment before crimsoned with blood, had borne away all traces of the diabolical catastrophe; and the tremendous machinery was slowly revolving in a contrary direction, so as to re-wind the ropes around the cylinders and draw up the weight in readiness for the receipt of the next victim!

But what of the Carmelite nun?—what of the two young pages?

Oh! human language has no power to describe the exquisite anguish with which this abhorrent spectacle had filled their souls—an anguish mingled with a fearful consternation—and a spectacle which would never fail to haunt their

memories at times for the remainder of their existence.

For although the White Lady had been an inmate of the subterraneans during twenty years, and although, as she herself had informed the pages, many victims had in that interval paid the awful forfeit of their lives to the vengeance of the Bronze Statue; nevertheless, she had hitherto escaped the contemplation of any portion of that stupendous punishment, the mere knowledge of whose details was sufficient to harrow up the soul without the necessity of becoming a witness of the accursed tragedy.

But now, at last, accident or destiny had led her to behold the most hideous phase of that punishment from which even in imagination she had so often recoiled as if from the menacing appearance of a monstrous serpent; and sick at heart, with a reeling of the brain and a film upon the eye, she stood leaning against the wall, mechanically holding the lamp and feeling like one laboring under the influence of a horrible nightmare.

As for Lionel and Konrad, *they* were stunned, crushed, annihilated by the appalling spectacle which they had just beholden; and, with their eyes still fixed upon the infernal machinery, as it slowly revolved in the process of rewinding the cordi and drawing up the weight, they could not so far collect their thoughts or master their sensations as to assure themselves that they were awake and not dreaming,—that they had just gazed upon a stern reality and were not the prey of a disordered fancy!

But, hark!--while the lady and the youths are thus under the influence of all the terror, consternation, and doubt excited by the awful spectacle which they have just witnessed, the bell sends forth its ominous sound again!

Almighty God! there is, then, *another* victim this night for the Bronze Statue and the Virgin's Kiss!

But, oh! not for worlds, no, not for worlds, would the Carmelite and the pages remain in that place to behold another representation of the hellish tragedy! The sound of that dreadful bell startled them all three into life and activity; and away, away from the chamber of the machinery, back, back into the mighty subterranean full of tombs, there to conceal themselves amidst the monuments and extinguish the lamp until it shall be prudent and safe to retrace their way to the apartments which they inhabit!

Nevertheless they could not shut out from their ears the terrible clanging of the bell when it rang the doom of the Marquis of Schomberg, that bell whose iron tongue sounded like the voice of fate amidst the vast subterraneans, and echoed through all the spacious vaults and stone corridors beneath the right wing of Altendorf Castle!

And the Marquis of Schomberg met his doom with the nerve of a man who summons all his courage to his assistance when he sees that death is inevitable; and thus, on this memorable night, were two victims devoted to the Virgin's Kiss!

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE BRIDAL CEREMONY.

It was nine o'clock in the evening of the day following the tremendous tragedy chronicled in the previous chapter: and the chapel of Altendorf Castle was blazing with light and brilliant with a gorgeously-attired congregation. The walls were hung with banners, and with drapery arranged in graceful festoons: glossy velvet curtains, massively fringed with gold, covered the arched windows; and a carpet of the same costly material was stretched upon the pavement.—Rows of chairs, covered with gilding and having rich velvet cushions, were placed for the accommodation of the ladies; and the nobles, the knights, and the gentlemen stood behind the seats thus set apart for the fair sex.

The altar was gorgeously decorated. Innumerable wax-candles blazed thereon, and tapers were arranged in branches round all the pillars which supported the lofty roof. From that sculptured ceiling, too, depended three gilt chandeliers, each containing twenty lights; and the plumes of the ladies were spangled with diamonds that shone like myriads of stars. Nothing could surpass the splendor of the scene; it was dazzling, bewildering, almost overpowering; for everything was radiant and penetrated with light.

In front of the altar two thrones were erected upon a dais approached by five steps; and yet the altar itself stood so high it was plainly seen above the backs of those royal seats. Superb vases of crystal and porcelain, some con-

taining flowers, and others perfume, were ranged round the chapel, so that the atmosphere was full of a delicious fragrance.

Near the great folding-doors, which opened from the entrance-hall of the Castle, a guard of honor was drawn up; and in front of the serried rank of warriors stood an ensign bearing the royal standard of Bohemia.

The ladies, as already observed, were most elegantly clad. Precious stones shone in profusion upon their plumes, their hair, their dresses; as if a gentle shower had sprinkled them and the drops had congealed into diamonds. It was a perfect blaze of lustre and loveliness, artificial flowers combined with natural charms.

The nobles and gentlemen were principally apparelled in Court dresses;—though some few wore their armor in testimony of their readiness to die for the cause wherein they had embarked: all had elegant pages in attendance upon them; and those who appeared in their steel panoply were followed by their squires bearing their helmets, shields, and lances.

Shortly after nine o'clock the vestry-door was thrown open; and five priests entered the chapel, attended by four beautiful boys carrying censers of frankincense and which they swung backward and forward by means of the gilt chains to which they were suspended. The ecclesiastical procession, which was headed by Father Cyprian, slowly and solemnly ascended the steps of the altar; and during the progress thither the organ began to play a sacred symphony which echoed grandly through the fret-work of the lofty Gothic chapel. Then the magnificent music was blended with the voices of a band of youths and maidens in the organ-gallery; and a sacred hymn was chanted with a most snblime effect.

When the anthem was concluded, the organist continued to pour forth a flood of voluntary music, throwing into the performance so much exquisite taste and skill, that he accomplished a perfect triumph of the art. Endeavoring to render his harmony a sort of panoramic painting to the ear, if we may be permitted the expression, he delineated the progress of certain phases of the queen's fortunes. First the organ imitated the national air which had welcomed her to the Castle: then it poured forth a strain where the mellow harmonies of harp and horn combined, expressive of the festivities which had celebrated her recognition as Sovereign of Bohemia; next the music became exquisitely melting and tender, as if to imply that Rodolph had wooed and won the love of the beauteous Elizabetha: then the solemn and sacred service of the nuptial-rites was duly delineated; again the harmony grew divinely sweet, to illustrate the happiness of the honey-moon: then suddenly it rolled and swelled into martial numbers, imitating the roar of battle and the rage of strife, the thunder of cannon and the clash of arms; and lastly it burst into an enthusiastic pœan of crowning triumph.

The winding-up of this voluntary performance was inexpressibly grand; the body of harmony appeared to fill not only every part of the spacious chapel, but to roll through the walls until imagination could follow and fancy how it died away in the far-off extremities of the ancient Castle.

And while the glow of enthusiasm produced by this grand achievement of the divine art, was still throbbing in every breast, shining in every eye, and burning upon every cheek, the vast folding-doors were thrown open, and the Baron of Altendorf appeared upon the threshold, exclaiming, 'The Queen!'

Then every lady rose from her seat, every noble and knight fell back, the guard presented arms, and the organ played a thrilling welcome, as Elizabetha entered the chapel.

But, oh! what a hideous mockery was all this pomp—what a delusion was that rapturous swell of the organ's glorious tones—what a false halo was shed by artifice upon that scene! Pale as death, with trembling steps and frightened looks, and with an awful feeling of oppression at the heart, did the young queen advance slowly towards one of the thrones placed in front of the altar.

She was robed in virgin white; alas! that the purity of her soul corresponded not with that of her garments! And yet the royal lady was far more to be pitied than blamed: for she was rather a victim to treachery black as hell, than an accomplice in her own dishonor.

The four handmaidens who we have already seen in attendance upon her during the journey from Prague, were now her principal ladies-in-waiting; and these were followed by twelve others, all selected with due regard to their beauty, their youth, their rank, and their aptitude to perform the part

of spies as well as servitresses about the person of the queen.

While advancing towards the throne that stood on the right hand, Elizabetha coldly acknowledged the salutations of the peers, the knights, and the ladies amidst whom she passed; and on occupying her seat, she appeared to fall into a deep and mournful reverie, forgetful of every thing that was taking place around her. But Father Cyprian at length descended from the altar under the pretence of doing homage to his sovereign; and the few words which he hurriedly whispered in her ears, aroused her from that waking trance and compelled her to assume, if not to experience, a certain interest in the scene.

Almost immediately after Elizabetha had thus taken her seat, Lord Rodolph entered the chapel. He was splendidly attired, and was followed by two gentlemen-at-arms and six pages. Triumph beamed in his eyes, as he acknowledged the salutations of the peers and as he bowed low to the ladies who smiled upon his path. and advancing with a dignified grace towards the queen, he sank upon one knee before her and pressed to his lips the hand which she mechanically extended to him.

Elizabetha then rose from her seat; and Rodolph conducted her up the steps of the altar, the ladies in attendance and the pages ranging themselves on each side.

The marriage-ceremony now commenced, and it proceeded up to that point in the Catholic ritual when the indissoluble knot was about to be tied for ever. But at this moment, while all present were kneeling, save Father Cyprian, who stood in front of the altar, and while the looks of all were fixed on that young couple on whom the nuptial benediction was about to be bestowed—while, too, the ambitious Rodolph was saying to himself, 'In another moment I shall be King-Consort of Bohemia!'—and while his father, the grim Baron of Altendorf, was already rejoicing in the event which thus allied his house to the royalty of the land—at that moment was it that a fearful cry broke upon every ear.

'Twas a cry that seemed to come from the depths of the earth—a cry such as the dead may send up from their graves when awakened on the day of doom—a fearful and a terrible cry, sounding like that of murder mingling with a northern blast.

At the same instant a column of red fire shot up from behind the altar screen, spreading slowly over that extremity of the chapel, and enveloping the sacred table and all who were near it in a brilliant roseate halo. Then, while the knights and nobles, the ladies and the dependants, were all gazing in silent consternation upon this wondrous spectacle, a female form suddenly appeared in the midst of the translucent splendor.

Despite of the rosy halo which surrounded her, it was easy to perceive that her countenance was pale and colorless as that of a corpse; while the apparel which clothed her form seemed like the garments of the grave.

The ladies shrieked, and either sank upon the floor or threw themselves with awful terror into each other's arms: the peers and knights laid their hands upon their swords, but dared not draw the weapons from their sheaths; Elizabetha fainted, Lord Rodolph was transfixed with dread, and the Baron of Altendorf, who had sprung from his kneeling posture, trembled from head to foot as if convulsions had seized upon him.

'Let not this marriage ceremony proceed!' exclaimed that female form, from the midst of the roseate halo which still continued to ascend around the altar. 'Heaven protests against it!' added the voice, which was musical and sweet, though thrilling and imperious in its tone.

Then did a terrible ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of the Baron of Altendorf; and, sinking upon his knees, he extended his arms towards the being in the midst of the roseate halo, exclaiming at the same time in a wild voice and with rending accent, 'Ermenonda! 'tis thou—'tis thou!'

And then, overcome by the tremendous recollections which burst into renewed and vivid existence in his brain, the baron fell heavily forward, deprived of consciousness.

Terrific was the scene of confusion which followed; for while a dense cloud of black smoke arose rapidly round the altar, superseding the roseate halo of light, and enveloping the mysterious female form in utter obscurity,—the company, a few minutes before so intent upon the marriage, rushed pell-mell towards the folding doors, the ladies screaming, battling with each other in their frantic eagerness to secure a prompt retreat, and utterly forgetful of the queen, whom they had left in a swoon behind them; and the peers and

gentlemen flying with equal precipitation, and with the same disregard for everybody and everything save themselves

The confusion was terrible! Ladies were thrown down and trampled upon, their shrieks adding to the horror of the scene; gemmed plumage was scattered, gorgeous apparel was torn, brilliant jewels were lost; and dismay was the ruling sentiment that inspired the whole company. Madly through the flying crowd of haughty nobles and titled dames, rushed Lord Rodolph; frantically he cleared a path for himself amid the fugitive, shrieking, affrighted throng—for his ears had caught the words which his father addressed to the apparition, and he fancied that it was his mother's spirit which had come to warn him against the marriage with the queen.

The chapel was at length cleared, or at least well nigh emptied of the brilliant assemblage which had crowded it a few moments before; but the young queen lay motionless in one spot, and the Baron of Altendorf unconscious in another. Even the Carthusian priest, usually so bold, so dauntless, so inaccessible to superstitious alarm, had fled; for *he* also, as well as Lord Rodolph and many others who were aware of the Christian name of the late baroness, believed that it was this lady's spirit whom the baron had addressed in those words of mingled wildness and horror.

But forth from behind the altar, a figure now stole—a venerable man dressed in the holiday garb of one of Altendorf's superior dependants; and, hastening towards the spot where the queen had fallen, he lifted her from the velvet carpet.

This old man was Hubert, the steward!

But scarcely had he raised the ill-fated sovereign in his arms, when a terrible cry escaped his lips—a cry which rang piercingly through the brain of the Baron of Altendorf and recalled him back to consciousness.

Thus suddenly re-awakened from the deep trance into which he had fallen, the grim noble sprang to his feet; and as the tide of awful recollections swept through his brain, bringing vividly back to his mind all that had just occurred, he flung his horrified looks around as if still fearful of encountering the apparition which had temporarily frozen the vital current in his veins and paralysed his whole being.

But all traces of that phenomenon had disappeared; the chapel was still blazing with the light of its innumerable tapers, and a sulphurous odor alone remained to convince the baron that the impression now uppermost upon his mind was not a dream. No: it was a proof that the roseate halo had really shone around the altar according to the belief which his fancy entertained; and thus receiving undoubted testimony as to one portion of the phenomenon, he could not doubt the rest.

And this chapel, where the tapers were still burning, was deserted! Priests, bridal party, nobles, ladies, and dependants—all had fled; and he was *there*—alone! No, not altogether alone; for at a little distance an old man was kneeling upon the velvet carpet, hanging over a lady clothed in virgin white, and whose countenance was white as her own raiment!

'Twas the queen—his son's bride—pale, marble pale; and that was Hubert who thus bent over her in the deepest, deepest affliction!

'My good old friend,' exclaimed the baron, in a tremulous voice, and drawing near with limbs that likewise trembled; for his nerves were so shaken and his spirit so daunted that he experienced the presentiment of all imaginable evils—'my good old friend, tell—keep me not in suspense—what has happened to the queen?'

'She is dead, my lord—alas! she is dead!' cried the old steward, down whose cheeks the big tears flowed.

'Dead! No—do not say it, Hubert!' exclaimed the baron, speaking like an affrighted child, and not with his wonted haughtiness and proud assurance.

'Yes, she is dead, my lord!' solemnly replied the old man; then gently withdrawing his arm from beneath the drooping head of the perished queen, and slowly rising to his feet, he continued in a profound and hollow tone, 'The last hope of Bohemia's royalty has withered, never to be restored! The young, the beautiful, and the high-born has fallen into that eternal sleep whence God alone can waken her. No more will the tears of sorrow bedew her cheeks—no more will her heart palpitate with a secret woe! Upon that fair head the royal crown will never press; those rigid hands will never grasp the orb and sceptre! 'Tis done—the day-dream of a momentarily resuscitated royalty is passed; the stern reality of death has swept away the

golden vision; and nothing now remains but to write the epitaph of this young queen who bore the sovereign title for three short days!'

While Hubert was thus giving vent to the reflections which gushed into his mind as he stood contemplating the lifeless form which lay at his feet, the baron was transfixed in speechless horror, gazing down upon those marble features whereon the brilliant light of the tapers played as if in mockery. The nobleman heard not the language which flowed from his dependant's lips; or rather, he heard, but heeded not! The shock which so sudden a change in the aspect of affairs had caused him to experience; the consciousness of cruel disappointment and blasted ambition; the knowledge that a diadem had fallen from the brow of his son just at the very instant when it seemed to be crowning him; the still vivid impression of the fearful circumstances which had wrought that change—all combined to bend, if not actually to break in a moment, the spirit of that bold, bad man!

And when it was known throughout the castle that the queen was dead, and that the royal cause—which was likewise the cause of the aristocracy—was ruined by this sudden catastrophe, a fearful consternation prevailed; and all was alarm, dismay, and confusion within the spacious fortalice of Altendorf.

And as if nothing should be wanting to enhance those feelings to the keenest poignancy, a courier arrived two days afterwards with the intelligence that John Zitzka had already quitted Prague at the head of a numerous army and was wending his way by forced marches northward.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SIEGE OF ALTENDORF CASTLE.

On the fourth morning after the terrible incidents which occurred in the chapel, the warder upon one of the watch-towers of Altendorf Castle descried a troop of horsemen advancing towards the stronghold; and in a few minutes a cannon was fired from the ramparts to announce to the garrison and the inmates of the mighty fortalice generally, that the Taborite army was now approaching.

Towards midday the vanguard and the light troops of Zitzka's force appeared upon the adjacent hills; and, taking a position at about three quarters of a mile's distance from the left wing of the castle, that division of the besieging armament soon pitched its white tents upon an eminence skirted by the forest, unfurled its banners amidst the loftiest trees, and planted its cannon upon a breast-work that was speedily thrown up in front of the encampment.

It was not until the sun was already steeping the western horizon in hues of orange, and purple, and gold, that the main body of the republican army debouched from the high road and began to stretch itself around the ancient castle, which was now the stronghold of the Bohemian aristocracy. Then did the huge volume of Taborite strength come rolling on in living waves, pouring its torrent of steel-clad warriors over the fertile plains where numerous herds and countless flocks had lately grazed; then did the flood of grim enthusiasts deluge the gardens and the fields, inundate the parks and the orchards, and urge its animated billows onward even unto the precincts of the forest which skirted the right wing of Altendorf Castle. The trampling of myriads of human feet and hundreds of horses' hoofs sounded like the din of a cataract, while songs of freedom and martial music swelled upon the gale.

With the trampling of feet, the clash of weapons, the neighing of war-steeds, the chanting of Taborite airs, and the roll of the gun carriages, mingled the wild dissonance of trumpet, timbrel and horn; and over the heads of the martial host waved the banners, amidst whose fluttering folds the eye might trace the words 'Tabor' and 'Zitzka,' and such inscriptions as '*Death to the Aristocracy*,' '*No Throne—no Coronet*,' *Equal Rights and Equal Property*,' *&c.*

At the head of a chosen troop of well mounted guardsmen rode John Zitzka, Captain-General of the Taborites and Governor of Bohemia. His countenance, despite the disfiguring loss that it had sustained, was ennobled by the animation that overspread it; and as the songs of freedom, chanted by the soldiery, fell upon his ears, his remaining eye shot fire, a deeper flush and a ruddier glow appeared upon his features, his form seemed to dilate into god-like proportions—and, in a voice that grew sonorous as a brazen trumpet, did he issue the commands which, while they

regulated the movements of his army, denoted the consummate skill of the general who delivered them, and the admirable discipline of the warriors who gave them their prompt obedience.

Upon every rampart, turret, elevation, and tower of Altendorf Castle, were the spectators gathered in dense crowds to behold the progress of the besieging force, as it thus defiled from the main road into the various positions which John Zitzka's skill directed the numerous sections to take up. The enthusiasm of Lord Rodolph and some of the younger warriors belonging to the garrison, would have prompted an immediate sally from the castle, in order to attack the Taborite armament while it was thus broken into divisions and small parties; but the Baron of Altendorf, whose more experienced eye instantaneously comprehended how easy it were for Zitzka to form his batle-line in a moment, explained the rashness of the step proposed by his son, whose ardor he nevertheless approved and encouraged, alleging, however, that in the first instance the policy of the garrison must be to defend and not to attack—to weary out the besiegers, and not to exhaust its own strength, much less stake every thing upon the risk of a general battle.

Thus was it that the Taborite army proceeded without molestation to form a complete circle about the vast stronghold of Altendorf; and when the sun went down, its latest beams, as they quivered above the horizon, threw into strong relief the white tents of the besieging forces, and glinted on the spear-points that marked the posts of the sentinels.

Then, the watch-fires being lighted, and the lurid glare of the flame flinging a ruddy glow upon the outskirts of the forest, the Taborite minstrels struck up exciting airs throughout the encampment, and the grand music of the harp and horn, the trumpet and the drum, the clarion and the cymbal, was accompanied by myriads of voices chanting the war-song of the hardy Republican Reformers.

THE TABORITE HYMN.

Sons of labor! sons of toil!
Human worms upon the soil,
  Trampled 'neath the great ones' heel,—
Rise, now or never, and proclaim
The freeman's cause—the tyrant's shame:
On—on, for all the rights ye claim—
  Revenge for all the wrongs ye feel!
    Endurance is a crime;
    And Patience, crushed by Time,
Turns to despair and grasps the glittering steel.

Sweating brows and blistered hands,
Starving serfs on fertile lands,
  List unto your children's moans.
What! shall they starve while every plain
Nurtures fat herds or golden grain?
E'en for a crust ye ask in vain—
  The lord of acres gives ye stones!
    Endurance is a crime;
    And Patience, crushed by Time,
Turns to revenge for starving children's groans.

Long—too long, O God! have we
Borne the chains that tyranny
  Rivetted around us fast.
Help us, thou Lord of hosts! and raise
Thy people up, that they may praise,
Not curse, the author of their days;
  And let this chorus swell at last,
    "Endurance is a crime;
    And Patience, crushed by Time,
Turns to just retribution for the past!"

Lo! a brighter dawn appears,
Fraught with hope for coming years—
  Freedom's smile for evermore!
Unfurl the banner—grasp the glaive;
A freeman's life or patriot's grave
Awaits the hero. On, ye brave,
  Though the path lead through floods of gore.
    Endurance is a crime;
    And Vengeance, fed by Time,
Turns into Hope when despots' sway is o'er!

Such was the hymn which swelled from the Taborite encampment—that encampment which stretched its vast circumference completely around Altendorf Castle; and as the thrilling words, issuing from myriads of tongues, rose into waves of swelling, pealing, thundering sound, the tremendous volume of rude martial harmony made the casements rattle and the doors quiver—aye, and even the massive walls shake, throughout the beleaguered stronghold. For against that mighty edifice did the stupendous chaunt beat like a battering-ram, sounding through and through the ancient fortalice, finding reverberations in every chamber, hall, and court-yard, and awakening the echoes even down into those awful subterraneans where so many mysteries lay cradled and so many momentous secrets were locked up!

Early on the ensuing morning the fighting commenced.

It being, as already stated, the Baron's policy to act entirely upon the defensive—at least for the present,—the initiative was taken by the Taborite army. From the breast-work before alluded to, Zitzka's cannon opened upon the Castle, which returned the fire with considerable effect. The Republicans then made an attack upon some out-houses which stood outside the circuit of the larger moat, occupying a little island formed by a smaller canal, and thus constituting a position of conside-

rable strength. The place was well defended by a detachment of the Aristocratic army; and as it was a point as important for the besiegers to obtain as for the besieged to occupy, the conflict became desperate in that quarter.

But in the meantime, throughout the spacious fortalice of Altendorf, the martial music had been sounding since daybreak, the banners waved and trembled in the morning breeze, and the clang of mailed or booted feet upon the pavement of court-yard, rampart, and tower, mingled with the varied noises and direful din of war. Within the apartments and halls of the mighty stronghold, the ladies who had still remained as guests or in company with their husbands, fathers, or brothers, at Altendorf Castle, and the female dependants of those noble dames, were unable to conceal, much less subdue, the terror which had seized upon them; and the moment the thunder of the cannon boomed from the position of the besiegers and was echoed back from the ramparts of Altendorf, the affrighted women huddled together with despairing looks, or fled to hide themselves in places that could have afforded no safety in case of the worst.

For three days was the little island containing the out-houses, vigorously attacked and as gallantly defended; but at the hour of the third sunset the Taborites seemed to be exerting a more than ordinary courage and putting forth almost superhuman efforts to accomplish their purpose. Then terrible was the conflict in that point for a short space. The din of arms, the clashing of swords, the braying of horns, the deep thunder of the cannon, the shouts of triumph, the appalling dissonance which marks the roar of battle and the rage of war.

From the nearest rampart did the Baron of Altendorf and his son Rodolph survey this bloody conflict,—the struggle of a few against a few—for there was no room for the engagement of numbers there; and when the Generalissimo of the Aristocratic army saw the desperate efforts which the Taborite warriors were making, he felt an icy sensation come over him, like a presentiment of evil in respect to the future. At the same moment a sudden burst of the declining sun broke upon the scene of strife, throwing a transitory glow of lurid splendor over the moat, the island, and the immediate vicinage; and thus, with an evanescent brightness, bringing into strong relief every warrior that was battling there. Then was it that the Baron of Altendorf and the myriads who crowded the ramparts of the Castle, distinguished the form of the Taborite hero in the very thickest of the fight. Yes—Zitzka himself was now there, in person leading the attack, and dominating the tide of battle which had ebbed and flowed so many times at that point during three whole days. In his red right hand he wielded, as if it were a feather, that tremendous sword which, as it flashed through the air and caught with a lightning effect the gleam of the setting sun, was winged with death to all who dared oppose the one-eyed warrior's progress.

Darkness fell upon the scene; the point was carried by the Taborites, the island was abandoned by the soldiers of the Aristocratic army, and this first success was hailed by one side as the harbinger of a speedy triumph, and by the other as an omen of eventual defeat.

On the following morning, the Taborites commenced a general assault upon the Castle. From every point did the enthusiastic besiegers press on to cross the moat, to break down the defences, to dash away all obstacles, and to storm the walls. The air pealed with the acclamations of the Republicans and with the shouts of defiance thrown back from the stern-looking ramparts of Altendorf. All was life, animation, and bustle around the Castle, and within it. A living ocean had come to dash its waves against the walls of Altendorf; and inside those ancient precincts, a pent-up flood was ready to burst forth and oppose its own bulk to that huge volume of an animated sea, which raged, and foamed, and roared around.

And now the attack commenced in desperate earnest. Hundreds of rafts, formed of the trees of the forest, were launched upon the moat; and beneath a murderous shower of barbed missiles and a galling fire from numerous hackbuts and petronels, did the hardy Taborites cross the canal upon those floating bridges. Then ladder after ladder were raised against the walls and mounted by the dauntless Republicans; ropes were slung, and the besiegers ascended, fast and furious, to the assault, As bravely were they met. 'Twas no child's play that now took place, but a fierce, a fearful, and a frightful struggle—hand to hand, and foot to foot—no hope nor thought of quarter on either side, but a tremendous conflict, which raised every soldier into a hero, and made every

hero a fiend incarnate for the time being!

Tremendous was the force with which the gallant Taborites pressed on to storm those walls that bristled with so many brave defenders. Torrents of missiles showered down on them; destruction and death were vomited forth from the cannons' mouths. Still onward pressed the Taborites; and where the scaling ladders were reared against the frowning front of old Altendorf, the besiegers were dashed precipitately down, either slain already, or else to perish in the moat, which now ran red with a sanguine tide. Nevertheless, as the Taborites were swept by whole ranks from the walls, or were hurled from the ladders, or else were hurled to destruction by those ladders breaking beneath them yet did they continue to succeed each other with an enthusiasm now maddened to a perfect frenzy.

By dint of pouring across the moat and upwards on the walls, these countless numbers in such unabated succession, the dauntless Republicans succeeded at last in establishing a footing upon the outward edge of the rampart. And now the spectacle presented to the view was as wondrous as it was terrible—as thrillingly interesting as it was frightful. For up the whole frontage of the left wing of the Castle did the Taborites now maintain themselves: it was one unbroken surface of human forms, covering the masonry as ivy covers a house front—the whole living mass thus appearing like a swarm of bees, without visible support otherwise than by each other.

Thus the activity of those Taborite warriors became as interesting and as marvellous as their courage. It was an activity which put into requisition every crevice in the walls, and which made available every projecting object, no matter however slight. Upon each other's shoulders did they climb; one above another did they thus raise themselves, either sustaining their balance with an admirable precision, keeping their footsteps with the wondrous tenacity of the chamois hunter of the Alps, or leaping from point to point in places where the antelope itself would scarcely have ventured. Had they been myriads of somnambulists thus performing feats from which they would have shrunk in horror and dismay if their senses were awake to the appalling peril, those deeds could not have inspired a more tensely wrought curiosity, nor an interest more breathlessly absorbing.

And all this time the din of battle was proclaimed in tongues but too appropriate and in voices too suitable to the hideous carnage. The roar of the cannon, though only bursting forth at long intervals, echoed from the ramparts of the Castle and the lines of the besiegers, and seemed to leap from hill to hill, reverberating in the distance like peals of rolling thunder.

Throughout that day raged the conflict; and even when the sun had gone down, and the moon lay upon masses of clouds, like a sultana pillowed on cushions of purple velvet edged with silver, the strife was continued. But though desperate were the endeaovrs of the Taborites to maintain upon the ramparts that footing which they had succeeded for a moment in establishing, though never was valor more dauntless nor strength more herculean, yet were they beaten back from the walls; and towards midnight the assault ceased.

Numbers had fallen that day—numbers on both sides! The Aristocratic army had fought with all the courage of desperation; the Baron of Altendorf exhibited the utmost skill in conducting the defence of his stronghold; and Rodolph had performed prodigies of valor. Nevertheless, the Taborites had given such proofs of an iron will and an adamantine determination, that there was not a soul within the fortalice of Altendorf who believed that the place could hold out for any length of time. Unless, indeed, some lucky casualty or unforeseen interposition should transpire to favor the Aristocratic cause and injure that of the Taborites; and it was to this chapter of accidents that the Baron and his officers trusted.

For several days did a cessation of hostilities continue. But in the meantime the Taborites were not idle. They were busily employed in constructing a huge bridge, or rather an immense barge, which they intended to launch upon the moat, and in which a battering ram might be worked. They also strengthened their own position in such a manner that their tents were protected from the cannon of the ramparts; and they stretched out their lines in every direction, so as to cut off all possible means of communication between the adjacent villages and the garrison of Altendorf. The outposts of the Taborite army were established beyond the little chapel in the forest, where, as the reader will remember, there was a

secret entrance into the subterraneans; and thus this means of egress or ingress was rendered utterly unavailable to the inmates of the Castle.

From the lips of a prisoner who was taken on that occasion, when the assault was attempted, Zitzka ascertained the precise position of the magazine where vast supplies of corn and flour had been garnered up for the use of the garrison; and he was resolved to make an attempt to destroy that important provision warehouse. Accordingly, in the midst of a night of pitchy darkness, when neither moon nor stars were able to penetrate through the sable canopy of heaven, Zitzka placed himself at the head of a small but chosen band of stalwart Taborites. Through the stolid blackness of that night did the cohort advance, through the sea of darkness did it wend its way. Not a word was uttered, not the faintest clash of a weapon was heard. The men knew their destination beforehand; and their hands were upon their swords to prevent them from rattling against their corselets. But though thus silent and wary; the men were full of spirits, full of hope, full of enthusiasm; for Zitzka was leading them in person, and in him they had implicit confidence. The known rapidity, boldness, and dexterity of his military manœuvres, and his stratagetic achievements, were indeed well calculated inspire such a feeling of reliance upon him.

On reaching the edge of the moat, two of the Taborites swam across; and to the wall of the Castle did they fasten the ends of two stout ropes which they dragged through the water after them. The other extremities were held by those who remained upon the bank of the moat, and by whom they were fastened to stakes into the ground. By means of the two ropes thus secured across the moat, the rest of the band passed over in silence and safety; and as they had chosen a spot where the exterior surface of the wall was much injured by the attempted assault made a few days previously, they easily found projecting and indenting places to sustain their footing as they noiselessly climbed the rampart.

Zitzka was the first who stood upon the battlements of Altendorf Castle; but almost at the same instant the alarm was given—a cry of terror burst around him—torches flared in a moment in all directions, and by their lurid flames, which streamed backward and forward like portentous meteors, the forms of armed men were seen running along the rampart, with their naked weapons glancing in their hands. The trumpets brayed, the drums beat, the great bell of the castle was rang, and the rumor spread like wildfire that the whole Taborite host had stealthily entered the fortalice.

Keeping together in a serried compact phalanx, Zitzka and his chosen band of two hundred men forced their way through the hurrying, scared, and bewildered soldiers of the garrison; and, leaping down into the court-yard, they beat aside all opposition and made good their progress to the corn-magazine. The door of this place was broken open in a few minutes; and some combustibles were thrown inside. Then Zitzka and his party turned to retrace their way: but this was not so easily accomplished. The panic had somewhat abated, the torches showed that the invaders were only few in number, and, on the discovery being made that Zitzka himself was at the head of the band, an ardent desire to effect his capture seized upon the most daring spirits of the Castle garrison.

Suddenly, upward burst a huge column of fire; and gave a terrible distinctness to the entire scene. Every feature of the adjacent buildings, every battlement, turret, and tower; aye, every window and every door, every buttress and every loop-hole,—all were brought into the strongest possible relief; while the hundreds and hundreds of armed men who were now seen gathering from all directions and in every spot, appeared like phantoms in the lurid glare.

But now a shocking, universal yell pealed from the garrison of Altendorf, when it was perceived that the sudden blaze which had burst forth arose from the granary. Zitzka and his band rushed forward to cut their way through the enemy: but before them was a wall of armed men whose helmets and corselets, spears and swords, glared in the light of the conflagration which was now spreading to other provision magazines adjoining the granary. For a few minutes the Captain-General and his Taborite heroes were pressed back, until the rear of the band was almost in contact with the flames. The heat was intolerably scorching, the smoke rolled over them in a dense volume, and they were maddened almost to a frenzy.

'Onward!' exclaimed the stentorian

voice of John Zitzka; and, in obedience to that voice which acted as a talisman upon the Taborite spirit, the dauntless *two hundred* poured with an irresistible fury upon the serried phalanx of the garrison.

Never was onslaught more terrific. Like incarnate demons did the republicans cut their desperate way through the soldiers of the aristocratic army. Clouds of smoke, beating down from the conflagration, enveloped the combatants at one moment, then cleared away at another, thus revealing all the horrors of the carnage. It seemed like an appalling display of human frenzy; and for upwards of a quarter of an hour did this bloody act of the exciting drama last.

At length Zitzka and his chosen party succeeded in hewing and hacking for themselves a path to the edge of the battlements; wholesale were the human trees of that animated forest of soldiery felled by the Taborites. in order to make their road clear. Knee-deep in blood did they wade; over the reeking, palpitating forms of the wounded, or the stiff and stark corses of the slain, did they pursue their appalling path.

But, as we have already stated, the edge of the rampart was gained at length; thence the Taborites leapt down into the moat, some being fortunate enough to alight upon the ropes stretched across, and others falling into the water. Most of them succeeded in gaining the opposite bank, though a few were reached by the missiles thrown from the walls, and some were drowned. In fine, the night's expeditions cost John Zitzka eighty of his most staunch and resolute adherents; but, viewing their loss only with the eye of a general, and of a general, too, who had twenty thousand men under his command, he regarded it as nothing when contrasted with the advantage gained by the destruction of the granaries and provision-warehouses of the beleaguered castle.

And in this calculation John Zitzka was right enough, for in a few days famine began to stare the inmates of that stronghold in the face!

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE INVALID KNIGHT

The mid-day radiance of an effulgent sun attempered to a genial atmosphere the chill which was naturally characteristic of the declining autumn; and there was a cheerfulness in the golden beams as they played upon the blackened ruins of Ildegardo Castle.

In the humble chamber of the little tower on the summit of the Donjon, Sir Ernest de Colmar awoke to consciousness.

He was lying in the couch—that couch where he had seen Satanais reposing her beauteous form; and this reminiscence suddenly filled his mind with a thousand conflicting thoughts.—His first impulse was, therefore, to spring from the humble pallet, to seek some one who could answer all the questions which he longed to put, and to satisfy himself how much of all that his memory now revolved was a dream, and how much a stern reality. But vain was the attempt to quit the couch, scarcely could the knight lift his head from the pillow, for it fell back again as heavy as lead.

Then the suspicion flashed to his mind that he must have been ill, very ill. And now he recollected that when the tremendous discovery of the identity of Gloria and Satanais burst upon him, he had felt his senses leaving him, but he had no consciousness of any interval between that moment and the present one of his re-awaking; on the contrary, it seemed as if he had merely closed his eyes at one instant to open them at the next.

Thus weeks, months, or years might have fled without casting even a shade of their phases upon the Austrian warrior's mind, and without adding a single incident to the store of varied and wondrous circumstances which his memory had garnered up to the very moment when that interval of delirium or of trance, whichever it were, began.

But, oh! how could he now persuade himself that either the past or the present was not a dream? There was no one in the chamber,—he was alone,—and all he knew was that he had remained an inmate of the turret-dormitory where the catastrophe of his love had taken place!

No, this was not quite *all* that he now knew; for some other little facts and circumstances began to develop themselves to his perception and set his conjectures to work. The chamber wore an air of comfort superior to his former impression of its aspect. A curtain of coarse but warm material was stretched over the door, evidently to exclude the

draught; strips of the same kind of cloth were fastened, for a similar purpose, round the rude window which occupied the loophole of the chamber; and on a table near the head of the couch stood several flasks of medicine.

While De Colmar's perception embraced these little appearances one by one, his thoughts grew so bewildered and distracted that he could fix them upon nothing, grapple with nothing. It was as if a mist were deepening around his imagination and over his brain,—making him feel like one wandering in a dream. There was before him sufficient testimony to show that a longer interval than a few hours had elapsed since he had sunk down in that turret-chamber deprived of consciousness,—the evident endeavors which had been made to increase the comfort of the place—and then those flasks of physic ———Oh! were not these to be taken as convincing proofs that the knight's sojourn there had been of some days, even if not of some weeks?

Closing his eyes in order to shut out the influence of all exterior objects, he set himself to work to rescue his ideas from the chaos into which they had been thrown; and by degrees his memory unwound its various threads from the entanglement of confusion. Then his mind resumed its tone; and he was enabled to arrange in their proper order and places all the occurrences of the past.

And oh! what a train of reminiscences now passed through his imagination,—along what a chequered vista of incidents did his memory retrace its way! His love for Satanais and the seductive wiles of Gloria,—his combat with the champion on the heath and the conditions imposed by that sable victor,—the journey from Prague with Gloria and the murder at the inn,—the continuation of the journey with Satanais and the halt at Ildegardo Castle,—Bernard's narrative and the supplementary explanations of Satanais,—the arrival of the Taborite party and the arrest of the dark-eyed houri,—and lastly, the stupendous discovery that Gloria and Satanais, instead of being twin-sisters, were one and the same person,—these were the salient features of the path along which De Colmar's memory now travelled with retrogressive step.

But while his soul was yet quivering beneath the influence of startling recollections, and bending beneath the weight of deplorable ones, still upon his mind did the bewildering conjecture force itself relative to his sojourn in that turret-chamber. How long had he been there? what was the nature of the illness which he had endured?—whose hand smoothed his pillow, administered his medicine, and bestowed an air of comfort on that anchorite-abode?

Again did he open his eyes and look around. It was no dream, no delusion,—he was there, on that humble couch, and appearances as well as his own sensations informed him that he had been seriously ill and was yet an invalid.

But while he was thus revolving a thousand ideas in his mind, the door opened gently, the curtain was thrust aside, and the floating, graceful figure of a female entered the turret-chamber.

A sudden ejaculation of mingled surprise and joy burst from her lips as her looks encountered those of Sir Ernest de Colmar, for the eyes of our hero gazed not now upon her in listless vacancy, nor with the wildness of delirium—but they expressed that recognition of her features which flashed instantaneously across his memory.

Yes, the warrior was gazing upon her, but without the power of utterance; and when the first feeling of mingled surprise and joy on her part had found for itself a vent in that sudden ejaculation, an indescribable confusion seized upon her, the tint of the rose deepened in a moment to the hue of the peony upon her cheeks; and averting her eyes from the sick man, she turned to quit the chamber abruptly.

Then De Colmar's tongue recovered its powers; the dread of losing the presence of that beauteous being unlocked it in a moment and restored the faculty temporarily lost; and he exclaimed in a lively accent of prayer, 'Angela,—dear Angela,—abandon me not!'

Oh! how those words, 'dear Angela,' struck upon the heart of the maiden,—not as a calamity strikes, with cruelty—but as an overpowering fragrance or potent perfume produces, even by its very deliciousness, a sensation of faintness. She staggered against the wall for support—her looks were flung back again upon the warrior's countenance—and at the same time a mortal pallor chased away the colour from her cheeks, leaving them stainless as the satin purity of the camellia. For to her soul had rushed the reminiscence that De Colmar loved another—loved, in fine, that mysterious

being whose double character of the Daughter of Glory and the Daughter of Satan was no longer a secret to Angela Wildon.

'Wherefore would'st thou leave me, fair one?' asked the Knight, in a tone which was made almost femininely soft by the attenuating influence of illness, and which was rendered full of pathos by the varied emotions that filled his breast.

'If I were about to leave your Excellency,' said Angela, her own silver voice sounding low and tremulous likewise, 'it was only to send the kind-hearted Bernard to receive your commands and afford those explanations which you doubtless require.'

'And can you not give me those explanations, Angela?' asked De Colmar, in a tone so gentle and so pathetic that it conveyed to the maiden's heart the most eloquent appeal for her to remain in that chamber. 'Something tells me that you have been my nurse during the indisposition whence I have just awakened to consciousness; and you will not leave me until I shall have expressed my fervent thanks—my lasting gratitude——'

'Oh! I claim no gratitude at the hands of your Excellency,' said Angela Wildon. 'I have merely performed a Christian duty; and now that your Excellency is approaching to convalescence, it were unseemly for me to intrude longer on your presence. I go, therefore——'

But she stopped short, and her humid eyes were cast for a moment upon De Colmar's countenance, as if to *look* the farewell which her emotions forbade her to *speak*. And he encountered that limpid look—a look so full of a mournful tenderness which not even the virgin's innocence nor female dignity of Angela could restrain; and as the returning blood retinted those cheeks to which mingled confusion and shame brought it back, the warrior read in an instant the secret of the forest-maiden's soul.

Yes: like an inspiration did the conviction flash to his mind that Angela loved him; and as he met the soft glance which trembled like the rays of a star in the twilight, he comprehended in a moment the virgin bashfulness which prompted her to retire and the influence of an irresistible tenderness which made her linger.

'Angela,' he said, after a brief pause, 'you must not leave me thus. You have been my nurse, and I shall henceforth regard you as a sister. Come—seat yourself by my bed-side—and pray enlighten me upon all that you may readily imagine me to be anxious to know.'

The forest-maiden, who was too artless and innocent to be a prude, immediately complied with the invalid warrior's request; and approaching the couch with an air of bashfulness mingled with dignity and modest reserve uniting with confidence, she took the chair which was placed near the head of the couch.

We need scarcely inform our readers that she no longer wore the brilliant suit of armour which she had taken from the Castle of Prague—but that she was apparaled in the plain though neat attire befitting her sex and social position. Her light chesnut hair flowed in rich waves and glossy undulations over her shoulders and down her back: her bosom was concealed beneath linen of snowy whiteness, to which it however imparted the shape of its virgin contour; and the roseate colour which had now returned to its natural brightness upon her cheeks, set off the purity of the lily which characterised her noble brow and her swan-like neck. Beneath the dark brown lashes that shaded them, the deep blue eyes seemed melting into a more profound sensibility and a deeper softness than usual; and her coral lips, slightly parted, allowed a glimpse of the rows of pearl which lay beneath.

The presence of so lovely a creature in that gloomy place and seated by his bed-side, made De Colmar feel as if he had awakened from a long trance to experience the holy and cheering influence of an angel's visit.

Thus for a few moments after she had seated herself by the side of his couch, the knight was unable to give utterance to a single one of all the momentous questions which a minute before crowded in so disturbed and exciting a manner upon his brain. All his thoughts—all his interests—all his sensations, were absorbed in the long regard of admiration, gratitude, and friendship, which he fixed upon the charming countenance of the forest-maiden. The softly stealing influence of her excessive loveliness was so mingled and attempered with the grave purity which characterised her every look, every word, and every movement, that De Colmar suddenly found himself involuntarily plunging into all the details of a minute contrast between the

artless, bashful, unsophiscated Angela Wildon, and the romantic, incomprehensible, and designing Gloria Ildegardo.

'Tell me, fair maiden,' at length said the knight, as he perceived that the earnest intentness of his look called up a fresh glow of crimson to her cheeks —a flush which deepened while it brightened the beauty of her soft, melting, soul-speaking eyes; 'tell me, fair maiden, how long I have been chained to this couch!'

'Six weeks have elapsed since the beginning of your excellency's indisposition,' responded Angela, her lips giving utterance to the words with a visible hesitation, inasmuch as she feared the effect which the announcement was calculated to produce upon the invalid.

'Six weeks!' he repeated, almost galvanised by the sudden excitement which Angela had dreaded. 'Is it possible that for six weeks I have lain unconscious of life—dead, in fact, to all and everything——'

'Oh! tranquillise yourself, I implore you!' interrupted Angela, looking down with so holy an earnestness upon his countenance, and that earnestness mingled with so tender and unfeigned an interest, that the gentle sway of woman as a ministering angel was immediately recognised.

'You are my nurse—my sister—my guardian spirit—my friend, Angela, he said, raising his arm with some difficulculty and extending his hand towards her, 'and I will obey you in all things. But tell me once again, is it possible that I have been ill for six long weeks?'

'It is true—alas! it is true,' murmured Angela, unable to restrain her tears; for she remembered how near unto Death's door had the object of her love—her hopeless love—been hurried more than once by alternate intervals of violent fever and utter prostration.

'Oh! you weep, you weep for me!' exclaimed De Colmar; and the forest-maiden felt his tremulous fingers gently press her own. 'Then I have been ill, very ill?' he demanded, with that nervous anxiety and suspense which showed in an instant that it would be imprudent to evade or delay the explanation so earnestly sought.

'Yes, your excellency has been very ill,' said Angela, withdrawing her hand. 'Indeed, your life was despaired of more than once——'

'And who has been my physician?' he demanded; 'for I need not inquire who has acted as my nurse.'

'The venerable Bernard has so effectually studied the nature and uses of herbs during his long solitary residence in this tower,' replied Angela, 'that he was not at a oss how to prescribe for your excellency.'

'And for six weeks, Angela, you have been my nurse—is it not so?' said De Colmar, in a tone that was tremulous with unutterable feelings.

'I have fulfilled that Christian duty with cheerfulness,' was the maiden's timid and hesitating reply. 'But, God be thanked!' she exclaimed, in a sudden and irresistible access of enthusiastic gratitude towards heaven, 'you are now beyond the reach of danger—the crisis has passed—convalescence is approaching, and may the Almighty speedily restore your excellency to health and happiness!'

As the maiden thus spoke, her eyes beamed with the softness of love and the lustre of pious devotion; and again did the invalid warrior gaze upon her with those mingled feelings which appeared the unknown inspirations of a sentiment such as he had never experienced nor even suspected before.

'You have been my nurse for six weeks, Angela,' he said, in a tone profoundly moved; 'and during that period I have been more than once at the point of death? Well, then, 'tis you who have saved my life——Oh! I can understand full well how devoted were the ministerings, how unwearied the attention, and how constant the care of which I have been the object! But you shall be rewarded, Angela; yes, you shall be rewarded, young maiden,' exclaimed the knight, a sudden flush rising upon his pallid countenance as if his soul glowed within him at the consciousness of possessing the means to deal forth recompense with a liberal hand; and the good Bernard shall have countless blessings showered upon him. For it is in my power to raise you, Angela, from a humble condition to a grade which you will embellish and adorn; while that faithful adherent of the ruined race of Ildegardo shall at least be settled in easy and affluent circumstances for the remainder of his days.'

'O God! do not excite yourself, I implore you!' exclaimed Angela, now regarding De Colmar with a singular expression of mingled terror and anguish; for the unsophisticated maiden naturally fancied that the invalid was raving, and that, forgetful of his position as a humble knight, he was assum-

ing to himself the lofty language and the sounding words of promise which were suitable only to the tongues of potentates and princes.

'Fear nothing, sweet Angela,' said De Colmar, a smile of radiant triumph playing upon his lips; 'my brain is not wandering, as I see that you fear it is. But enough upon that subject for the present. I have yet many questions to ask, and you many replies to give. Tell me, then, how you came to be my nurse—how you heard of my illness—'

'Ah! now will your excellency pardon me for the duplicity which I exercised towards you?' exclaimed the forest maiden, bending down her blushing countenance, and speaking in a tone that was breathless and broken with embarrassment, confusion, and suspense.

'Duplicity!' repeated De Colmar. '*You* guilty of duplicity towards me?' he cried, surveying Angela Wildon with the deepest astonishment. 'Impossible!'

'And yet it is true,' murmured the maiden, the crimson glow spreading from her countenance over her arching neck and all that the modest vesture left exposed of the alabaster shoulders.

'But of what nature was that duplicity!' demanded the knight, with increasing amazement.

'The concealment of myself beneath a deep disguise——'

'Oh! what mean you, Angela?' exclaimed De Colmar, a suspicion of the truth flashing to his mind, but which he instantly rejected as impossible.

'I mean, Sir Knight,' answered the maiden, in a still more murmuring tone, and with a deeper glow upon her cheeks and neck, 'I mean that in the disguise of the polished armor——'

'Then it is so!' ejaculated De Colmar, finding that the suspicion so suddenly entertained and so promptly rejected, was indeed the true one: and, lost in an amazed admiration of the heroine, he again fixed upon her those looks that spoke far more eloquently of gratitude, astonishment, and fervid friendship than the most impassioned words could possibly have done.

But Angela sate trembling and bashful, with blushing countenance and averted eyes; because she knew—she saw—she felt that De Colmar read the secret of her love for him—and, in her maiden modesty, she was ashamed and confused as if she had committed a crime.

'Yes—now I comprehend it all!' said the Knight, at length giving utterance to his ideas in a musing tone. 'Your adopted parents are in the service of the good Lord Rosenberg—and he was imprisoned by Zitzka. Your soul beat with the aspirations of a heroine—and you repaired to Prague to accomplish his deliverance. You succeeded: and then accident—or rather Providence—led you to the White Mansion in time to save my life. Oh! how deep is the debt of gratitude which I owe you, Angela: how manifold are the services that I have received at your hand!'

'And did I owe *you* nothing?' said the forest-maiden, in a low and softly musical voice, as she now ventured to to turn her limpid looks once more upon the Knight's countenance. 'Did you not rescue me from the power of Lord Rodolph in the forest?—did you not save me from drowning in the vicinage of Prague?'

'Yes—but your deeds towards myself outweigh those services ten thousand-fold!' exclaimed De Colmar. 'For how many times hast thou saved *my* life, Angela? First upon the heath, when you found me lying deprived of consciousness: next at the White Mansion, when I had fallen into a hornet's nest of enemies; thirdly, beneath the walls of this Donjon, when your seasonable arrival and your gallant hand turned the fortune of the conflict provoked by the vile Carthusian and his bravos; and now, within the last six weeks, heaven alone can tell how often your kind ministerings and gentle attentions may have arrested the vital spirit when wavering on my lips and about to flee away for ever! Oh! yes, Angela—dearest Angela—immense is the debt of gratitude which I owe to thee; and henceforth thou shalt be unto me as a sister!'

'Your Excellency will pardon me if I should appear to receive with coldness these generous professions of friendship,' said Angela, with a deep gasp and a powerful swelling of the heart in spite of her endeavors to speak calmly and look composed: but, now that your Excellency is convalescent, I must bid you farewell—I must return to my forest-home——'

'Oh! do not desert me until I am fully restored to health!' exclaimed De Colmar, taking the maiden's hand and holding it with a species of nervous force as he gazed earnestly and anxiously up into her eyes to read in those

dark blue depths the response to his appeal.

'Wherefore—wherefore should I stay?' cried Angela, almost impatiently, as she withdrew her hand: for she remembered that a few weeks had only elapsed since it was the hand of Gloria which the warrior had been wont to press with tenderness,

'Wherefore should you stay?' echoed De Colmar, pained by the question, and hurt likewise by the abruptness with which the forest-maiden had now withdrawn her hand a second time from his clasp. 'Oh! is it not possible that you can have become dear to me, dear as a sister——'

'No, no, do not delude me with such a hope!' murmured Angela; and, averting her head, she seemed agitated with thoughts that allowed no utterance.

'Angela,' said the knight, after a long pause, and speaking in a tone of the deepest solemnity, 'I implore you not to leave me! Some days must elapse ere I can quit this couch; and it would be death—oh! death through sheer monotony and gloom,—were this chamber no longer lighted, cheered, and blessed by your presence. Tell me, then, Angela, dear Angela, tell me, thou whom I love as if you were my sister,—tell me that you will not abandon me yet awhile.'

The maiden threw upon the knight a rapid and trembling look; then she turned away her countenance and reflected profoundly for nearly a minute; and then, once more casting her melting blue eyes towards the invalid, she murmured with the touching melody of her silver voice, 'No, I will not leave you yet!'

And scarcely was this promise rewarded by a look full of gratitude on the part of Sir Ernest de Colmar, when the door was opened gently and the venerable Bernard entered the turret-chamber.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE KNIGHT, THE FOREST-MAIDEN, AND BERNARD.

We must here interrupt the regular course of our narrative for a moment in order to explain how it was that Angela Wildon became the nurse of the Austrian knight during his dangerous indisposition of six weeks.

The reader will remember that almost immediately after the termination of the conflict with the Carthusian's party in the court-yard of Ildegardo Castle, Angela Wildon mounted her horse and galloped away. She repaired straight to the abode of her adopted parents, whose forest-residence was not many hours' ride from Ildegardo Castle. By that worthy couple Angela was received with open arms—although they were naturally amazed to behold her clad in the suit of shining panoply.—The narration of her adventures, however, soon explained how she became possessed of it; and until a late hour in the night did the maiden and her adopted parents sit up to discourse on the various matters which had occurred to interest them.

On the following morning Angela resumed her female garb, and mounting her horse—De Colmar's valued gift—for the purpose of taking that exercise which she so much loved, an irresistible feeling of curiosity prompted her to ride across to Ildegardo castle, and view the scene of the previous day's conflict. Not for an instant did she suppose that De Colmar's party had tarried there during the night, much less that she was destined to find the warrior himself an unconscious occupant of old Bernard's dwelling-place. Yet such indeed proved to be the result; for, on reaching the ruins about midday, Angela encountered the knight's two grooms, who gave her a brief and rapid outline of all that had occurred—at least so far as they could comprehend it. Enough was, however, explained to Angela to enable her to understand that Satanais had been suddenly arrested that morning by a party of Taborites; that she had been forcibly carried away, her handmaidens accompanying her; and that De Colmar had been seized with a dangerous indisposition on account of some extraordinary discovery made upon the occasion.

All this was more than sufficient to awaken Angela's curiosity and excite her interest; and hastily seeking Bernard's turret-chamber, she represented herself as an acquaintance of the knight. The old man was too much rejoiced to obtain the ministering attentions and care of a female on behalf of the knight, to ask many questions respecting her knowledge of him; and Angela at once undertook the duties of nurse. One of the grooms was despatched to her for-

est home to give such explanations to her adopted parents as would satisfy and tranquillise them relative to the cause of her absence; while the other groom was sent off to the nearest town to procure such medicaments as Bernard's self-taught experience enabled him to prescribe.

Thus was it that Angela became a 'ministering angel' by the bed-side of De Colmar. But when she and Bernard had leisure to converse together, it was with an indescribable amazement that she heard from the old man's lips how Satanais and Gloria were one and the same person—a fact proved by Zitzka's note, which Sir Ernest de Colmar had dropped, and which Bernard had subsequently picked up.

For six weeks did Angela remain in constant attendance upon De Colmar—sometimes passing the whole night in sleepless vigils by his bed-side, and only quitting him for a few minutes at a time to breathe the fresh air upon the roof of the Donjon. The little sleep she obtained during that long interval, was snatched while reclining in the chair by the patient's bed-side, or else by stretching her weary limbs upon a cloak spread on the floor of the chamber; and yet her health gave not way, nor did the bloom fly from her cheeks, nor the lustre leave her eyes; for it was a labor of love, a task of pleasure, with the devoted maiden; and as her spirit was sustained, so where her physical energies supported.

Hard was the battle which De Colmar's constitution had to wage against the multifarious assaults made by Death; and often was the influence of the destroyer repelled solely by the succor which the invalid received at the hands of his lovely nurse. For she was ever there to bathe his feverish brow; to hold the cooling cup to his parched lip; to administer his medicine; to lull him into slumber with the melody of her sweet voice; to watch him when he was raving in delirium; to apply restoratives when utter prostration supervened; in fine, to tend upon him with all that holy devotion and blessed self-sacrifice which Woman alone can demonstrate.

In her difficult task she derived from Bernard such occasional assistance as it was requisite for him to afford; and the old man, speedily perceiving how profound was the interest which Angela took in the recovery of her patient, fervently prayed to heaven that De Colmar might be eventually restored to health and life, if it were only for the sake of the admirable young woman who had devoted herself to his bedside.

Now, therefore, when, at the expiration of six long weeks, Bernard, on entering the sick chamber, as usual, found the Austrian knight not only in a state of complete consciousness, but also in a fair way to speedy convalescence, he could scarcely restrain his joy; and cutting short the expressions of gratitude which Sir Ernest was pouring forth in acknowledgement of his kindness and attentions, the old man turned towards Angela and caught her by the hand, exclaiming, 'Your excellency must thank God first, and this maiden next; for without the mercy of the former and the unwearied devotion of the latter, you would have long ere this been cold in the tomb!'

Then how deep was the blush which overspread the countenance of Angela—suffusing the purity of the lily with the crimson of the peony—then deepening as rapidly into the richest hue of the carnation; and, although Bernard had spoken from the best and most conscientious motives, yet at the moment she scarcely thanked him for the speech—nay, she even felt vexed and annoyed, because it covered her with such confusion.

And De Colmar, who read all these feelings in her countenance, took her hand once more; and, raising himself by a strong effort in the couch, he carried it to his lips, saying, 'I love thee, Angela, as a sister. Bear witness, Bernard, to this fraternal love which I pledge to the generous-hearted, noble-minded Angela Wildon.'

'No language can express the praise which she deserves,' exclaimed the old man, with as emphatic an accentuation as before. 'Would to God that she were my daughter—Oh! how proud of her I should be!'

'And you may be proud of her acquaintance and friendship yet,' said De Colmar, with a strange and mysterious significancy.

In spite of herself did Angela throw a glance of mingled curiosity and surprise upon the knight's countenance; for this was not the first, nor yet the second time that she had heard him hint at his power to recompense those who served him or for whom he cherished a friendship.

On the night when they escaped from

the White Mansion, and when they halted to rest in a neighboring grove, De Colmar had addressed himself in that language towards her, while believing her to be of the male sex. He had even gone so far as to promise the distinction of knighthood at the hands of tha mighty Albert, Duke of Austria. And now again, on this first day of resuscitated consciousness after a tedious and dangerous illness, the warrior spoke in a similarly lofty strain; and Angela, beginning to feel bewildered at these facts, the aggregate importance of which only struck her for the first time, knew not what to think, and felt a vague trouble stealing into her mind.

'We must not weary his excellency with our conversation, nor excite him with our presence,' said Bernard, after a short pause. 'Come, let us leave him to repose awhile.'

'No, do not quit the room, my dear friends,' interrupted the knight; 'at least not until you have relieved me from suspense on one or two subjects wherein I am interested. Tranquilize my mind by appeasing my curiosity, and then shall I be enabled to snatch a few hours' repose.'

'His excellency speaks well,' said Bernard, addressing the observation to Angela. 'Let us endeavor to sooth him to the utmost of our power.'

'And in order to do this,' remarked De Colmar, 'you must reply candidly and soothly to all the questions which I am about to put to you. In the first place, then,' he continued, his voice suddenly becoming tremulous and his manner embarrassed as he glanced towards Angela, 'may I hope that the arrest of a certain lady was followed up by no consequences of a still more serious character to herself?'

'The rumor has been spread abroad,' said Bernard, 'that the Lady Satanais has retired to some remote and profound seclusion, there to pass the remainder of her days. That the dark-skinned favorite of the Taborites was the same identical being as the golden-haired daughter of Ildegardo, does not seem to have become generally known In a word, the romantic scene which took place in this turret-chamber six weeks ago, has been kept deeply secret by those who witnessed it.'

Angela had turned away her counte nance at the moment when the knight began to put the question relative to Gloria; nor did she once glance towards him while old Bernard was giving the explanation just recorded.

'And now tell me,' said De Colmar, after a long pause, 'how stand the political affairs of Bohemia?'

The topic of conversation was instantaneously thrown by this query into a new channel; and the forest maiden now ventured to revert her eyes towards the invalid s couch. Her looks met those of the knight, and a visible trouble came over each. It escaped the notice of Bernard, but a keener observer would have fancied that the warrior and the maiden were both seized with the same sentiment, Nevertheless there was a difference in the feelings that thus simultaneously affected them, although the outward and visible signs were exactly the same. But with De Colmar the confusion and embarrassment arose from the consciousness that he must have given pain to the gentle Angela by the demonstration of a lingering interest on behalf of Gloria Ildegardo; whereas with the forest maiden herself, the source of trouble and shamefacedness was the fact that she had exhibited a jealousy which her dignity as a woman should have subdued.

But the sense of confusion was speedily dissipated on either side by the alacrity with which old Bernard hastened to answer the question which Sir Ernest de Colmar had put relative to the affairs of Bohemia.

'The six weeks during which your excellency's indisposition has lasted, has been characterised by many and eventful circumstances,' said the old man, in a tone solemnly measured to the importance of his narrative. 'In the first place the Queen of Bohemia is dead.'

'The Queen of Bohemia!' ejaculated De Colmar. 'Whom do you mean? The Princess Elizabetha?'

'The same,' replied Bernard. 'She was conducted to Altendorf Castle just about the same time your excellency's adventures took place amidst these ruins; and at that stronghold was she saluted as Queen of Bohemia by all the most powerful nobles of the country. But everything was done with an unheard-of precipitation and a most suspicious haste. Recognised as queen one day, she was to be married to Lord Rodolph the next——'

'Married to Lord Rodolph?' exclaimed De Colmar, his surprise increasing with every fresh detail that met his ears.

'Such is the fact, as I have heard it

from many travellers passing this way,' said Bernard, 'and moreover it has been the talk of the surrounding villages ever since. Great festivities took place for three or four successive days at Altendorf; then came the bridal evening,—and on this occasion some dreadful incident occurred. What it was, has never been fully ascertained; no doubt there was good reason, in more quarters than one, to hush it up. But rumor does say that an apparition arose in a blaze of glory from behind the altar-piece, that the form resembled a corpse dressed in its winding-sheet,—and that it forbade the alliance between Lord Rodolph and the queen. How true all this may be, I know not; certain it is, however, that something terrible *did* occur in the chapel, and the queen was struck dead by sudden alarm,'

'This is strange and mournful intelligence, good Bernard,' said the knight, not knowing what to think of the marvellous tale just related.

'Strange and mournful indeed!' ejaculated Angela with so singular an accent that the looks of Bernard and De Colmar were immediately and simultaneously turned upon her. 'But why have you never told me all this?' she demanded of the old man.

'Because you were so unwearied and so constant in your attendance upon his excellency, that you never had leisure nor inclination to converse upon any subject that did not regard himself or the progress of his malady. And moreover,' added Bernard, 'I should not have thought that you were to any extent interested in such matters as those whereof I have been speaking.'

'True! and it was natural that you should have deemed me thus indifferent,' said Angela, in a musing tone,—then she passed her hand in momentary consideration across her brow,—from her brow that fair hand reached her lip on which the fore-finger rested for a moment, and then it sank in a listless sort of embarrassment.

'Angela,' said De Colmar, regarding the maiden with an earnest interest and profound attention, 'the intelligence just imparted by the venerable Bernard has affected you strangely.'

'Oh! question me not!' she cried, absolutely starting as if fearful that the secret which she cherished respecting the White Lady should escape her in a moment of self-forgetfulness, for the instant old Bernard's narrative of the occurrences at Altendorf Castle fell upon her ears, did her imagination associate the White Lady with those mysterious and apparently supernatural incidents. 'No, question me not,' she repeated, 'but continue your recital, Messer Bernard, I beseech you.'

'Many and momentous things may be summed up in a few words,' resumed the old man. 'Scarcely was the queen's hurried funeral performed, when John Zitzka appeared at the head of twenty thousand men around the walls of Altendorf Castle.'

'Not even this incident did you make known to me!' exclaimed Angela.—'But pray proceed. What has happened at Altendorf?'

'The siege still continues,' replied Bernard. 'Numerous assaults have been made upon the stronghold; but the defence is gallantly conducted. The provision magazines were destroyed by a desperate achievement on the part of Zitzka; and it is generally believed that famine already presses the garrison.'

'Famine,—O God!' ejaculated Angela, becoming deadly pale, for her profoundest interest was now awakened on behalf of the White Lady. 'But are you sure, Messer Bernard? are you certain that such is indeed the case?'

'I have no better authority than rumor,' replied the old man, 'for if it be true that famine is an inmate of Altendorf Castle, the garrison keep the appalling secret to themselves. Never was a beleaguerment conducted with more perseverance or defended with more desperate valor.'

'But the Captain-General of the Taborites will triumph at last,' observed De Colmar, 'for he is assuredly one of the greatest warriors of the age. And now tell us, good Bernard, what is the condition of the other parts of Bohemia?'

'The Taborites are everywhere dominant, save in these southern districts,' responded Bernard. 'Zitzka's lieutenants rule the north, the east, and the west; and when the south is subdued, all Bohemia will be in the hands of the Reformers.'

'What other intelligence have you for me?' inquired De Colmar, after a long pause, duaing which he appeared to be reflecting profoundly upon the words that had last fallen from the old man's lips.

'Ah! I remember,' exclaimed Bernard, a sudden recollection flashing to

his mind. 'I have been chatting to your excellency for this last half hour concerning the affairs of Bohemia,—whereas I should have bethought me that something which has occurred in respect to your own native Austria would prove of still greater interest to your ears.'

'Indeed! what, then, has happened in Austria?' demanded the knight, with a feverish impatience. 'Speak,—old man,—speak! I conjure you not to keep me in suspense!'

'Nor will I,' said Bernard. 'Know, then, that the Emperor Sigismund of Germany is no more——'

'The emperor dead!' cried De Colmar, the whole couch quivering with the sudden start which he gave and which seemed to run through his form like an acute spasm.

'Yes, five weeks have elapsed since the venerable Sigismund breathed his last at Aix-la-Chapelle,' continued Bernard, 'and the result of the new election reached my ears yesterday.'

'And that result, good Bernard?—what was it?' demanded the knight, a strange and feverish expression of mingled hope, suspense, and fear, glittering in his eyes.

'The result was,' responded Bernard, 'that the unanimous choice fell upon a certain great prince who had not offered himself as a candidate, nor was even present to record his own vote on the occasion.'

'And that prince?' said the invalid warrior, in a voice that was breathlessly gasping with suspense.

'The new Emperor of Germany,' rejoined Bernard, 'is the mighty and chivalrous, the brave and generous Albert Duke of Austria.'

De Colmar endeavored to raise himself up in his couch, but he could not. The color rushed to his cheeks like blood poured out upon snow; then the living crimson died as suddenly away, leaving that countenance more pallid than before. He strove to speak; but his tongue refused to give utterance to the words that rose to it. Gasping, suffocating, fainting, the warrior seemed as if the excitement produced by Bernard's last intelligence would overpower him altogether.

But Angela was ready, that dear ministering angel!—to bathe his brow, to pour cordials down his throat, to apply strong essences to his nostrils. And in a short time De Colmar regained his consciousness and slowly turning his head, he fixed upon the forest-maiden one of those looks, and bestowed upon her one of those smiles in which there is more gratitude, more friendship, and perhaps even more love, than in the softest words!

Bernard now administered a gentle opiate, slumber soon stole over the invalid warrior, and he slept for many hours.

CHAPTER XC.

THE FAREWELL.

It was night, and the lamp burnt upon the rude table in the turret chamber, when Sir Ernest de Colmar opened his eyes again.

Angela—the charming, lovely, pure-minded Angela—was seated by his couch; and the moment the invalid warrior awoke, she bade him partake of a strengthening broth which she had prepared for him. He complied with her request, and he then said, 'Dearest sister—for such you must permit me henceforth to call you—tell me whether I have been dreaming, or whether it be really true that the Emperor Sigismund is no more, and that the Sovereign-Duke of Austria has been elected to the imperial throne?'

'Such, your excellency, was the venerable Bernard's report,' answered the forest maiden. 'But you must not permit these and other incidents to occupy your attention to such a degree as to produce an excitement that may be accompanied with danger.'

'Would that I were able to follow your counsel, my kind and gentle nurse!' said De Colmar; then, after a long pause, he observed, 'It would prove a great relief to my mind if I were able to despatch one of my grooms forthwith to Vienna. 'What is the hour, sweet Angela?'

'It must be verging towards midnight,' she responded. 'But I will hasten to arouse Messer Bernard, and he will summon hither one of your excellency's dependants.'

'No, let the matter rest until morning,' said De Colmar. 'I would rather endure all the pangs of impatience than permit you to go wandering about these ruins at such an hour.'

'Is that the only reason wherefore your excellency would postpone until the morrow a matter which your inter-

ests prompt you to expedite at once?' asked Angela; and without even waiting for a reply, she hurriedly quitted the turret chamber.

This readiness to oblige, this charming and unaffected promptitude in fulfiling his wishes, made a deep impression upon Sir Ernest de Colmar. Not for a moment did he fancy that he loved Angela, nor did he believe that the image of Satanais could ever be entirely effaced from his soul; but he experienced towards the forest maiden a boundless gratitude for the numerous services she had rendered him—an immense sympathy for that gentle heart whose secret love for himself he had discovered, and a profound friendship amounting to a brotherly tenderness, which would prompt him to do everything in his power to ensure the felicity of Angela, and make even large personal sacrifices sooner than allow tears to flow from those sweet blue eyes, or care to seize upon that lovely bosom as its home.

In a quarter of an hour one of De Colmar's grooms entered the turret-chamber. Angela remained outside, leaning over the parapet of the mighty donjon, and contemplating the lovely moon which was advancing in silent majesty over the far-off hills.

For upwards of twenty minutes did the groom remain with his master; and, on coming forth, he descended straight to that portion of the ruins where the horses were stabled. Having saddled his steed and said farewell to his comrade, he rode forth from the dilapidated remains of Ildegardo Castle, and soon reached the grand highway leading towards Vienna.

Meantime Angela had returned to the knight's chamber, and she was rejoiced to observe that his mind now appeared much easier since he had despatched his dependant upon a secret mission to the Austrian capital. Slumber soon revisited his eyes; and when she was assured that her patient slept, the forest maiden spread a cloak upon the floor and lay down to snatch a short interval of repose.

De Colmar awoke in the morning considerably refreshed. His physical energies were so far restored that he could raise himself without difficulty in the bed; and he partook with appetite of the repast which Angela had prepared for him. When it was concluded, he said to the maiden, 'Sit down by my side, sweet sister, and permit me to converse with you for a few minutes.'

Angela obeyed; but a blush appeared upon her cheeks and her heart palpitated audibly to her own ears, as she marvelled within herself upon what topic the knight was about to address her.

'Dearest friend and well-beloved sister,' resumed De Colmar, 'I did not fail to notice that the information which Bernard gave us yesterday morning relative to the beleaguerment of Altendorf Castle, troubled thee strangely. Now I seek not to penetrate into thy private thoughts, but if there be any point on which I can counsel thee——'

'Permit me to ask your excellency a question,' said Angela, hastily interrupting the invalid. 'Suppose that there were secret means of communication with Altendorf Castle; suppose likewise that the entrance to this private avenue was outside the moat; indeed, at some considerable distance from the interior of the stronghold itself, would it be possible for a bold and adventurous person to pass the lines of the besieging force and penetrate into the fortalice? Your excellency's knowledge of military matters must doubtless lead you to judge of the probable position of the Taborite army before the walls of Altendorf; and therefore do I seek this information at your hands.'

'Sweet Angela,' responded the knight, after a few moment's consideration, 'I should say that it were impossible for any individual, however daring and courageous, to accomplish the task you have mentioned. From the intelligence which we yesterday received from Bernard's lips, it is clear that the Taborites are pressing hard upon the garrison; that they are relying on famine to aid them in the reduction of the castle, and that therefore they have drawn their lines all round the stronghold and close up to its very walls.'

'Ah! it is, then, as I feared,' observed Angela, suffering a long and slow exclamation to escape her lips, accompanied with a sigh, as if she had just received the death-blow to a hope previously entertained and yet even then commingled with alarm.

'Is it possible, heroic maiden,' exclaimed De Colmar, 'that you purposed to introduce yourself into Altendorf Castle, with a view of carrying succor to some one whose condition there appeals to your sympathies and invokes your interest?'

'Such is the case,' replied Angela.

'There is—at least I have every reason to suppose that she is still there—a lady within those walls——But I dare not say more on this subject——'

'Dearest Angela, methinks I can aid you in this difficulty,' observed the knight.

'Oh! if this were possible!' exclaimed the virgin heroine, clasping her hands fervently; then, after a few moments' pause, she said with an artless melancholy, 'But I shall be compelled to abandon your excellency to such attentions as Messer Bernard or your own remaining dependent may be enabled to afford.'

'Oh! then you are mindful of your promise, Angela, to stay with me until my recovery be complete?' cried De Colmar. 'But I will not, by any selfishness on my part, prevent another from receiving the benefit of your services. No, I release you from that promise; and much as it will grieve me to lose your sweet company—much as it will distress me to part with you—'

'Were your excellency still in danger, I would not offer to leave you,' said Angela, her own tell-tale blushes indicating that she experienced with even a keener poignancy that feeling of regret at the idea of an early separation. 'But advancing rapidly as you are towards convalescence, and with all but certain prospects of being enabled to resume your journey to Vienna within a week from the present time, I cannot remain deaf to the secret voice which prompts me to carry my services elsewhere——'

'Nor will I mar your usefulness, heroic maiden, in the slightest degree, or for a single moment!' exclaimed De Colmar, fixing upon her those looks which conveyed the most exalted admiration, 'Here, take this ring, 'twas a present from Zitzka himself, and it will serve as a talisman to enable thee to pass the lines of the besieging army. You need but show it to whomsoever you find barring your way, or disposed to question your presence in the Taborite encampment; and, unless its virtue shall have been revoked by a recent decree of the Captain General, the magic power which I myself have tested more than once, will serve you to the full extent of the noble purpose that you have in contemplation.'

'I accept the ring with the sincerest and most heartfelt thanks,' said Angela, as she received the jewel from De Colmar's hand, 'And now——'

But she was unable to breathe the farewell to which she sought to give utterance; the words remained in her throat with a suffocating sensation, her heart grew full even to overflowing, and the pearly tears trickled down her cheeks. Covered with confusion, she averted her countenance; tremendous were the efforts she made to subdue her emotions and regain her composure; but the very attempt was a superadded torture, and, yielding to the force of the varied sensations which had taken complete possession of her soul, she burst into a violent agony of grief.

For some minutes De Colmar suffered her to weep. He knew not how to console her—he was utterly at a loss how to frame in words the sympathy which he experienced for her. There was so solemn a purity in her affliction, so grave an artlessness in her sorrow, that the wounds of so generous, noble, and energetic a spirit were not to be reached by the ordinary anodynes. Besides, not only did circumstances, but also the chivalrous character of De Colmar himself, suggest that the most delicate course must be adopted towards a beauteous young woman who loved him fondly—who possessed much extensive and manifold claims upon his best regards—and yet to whom it would be improper and inconsistent in the extreme to venture any declaration of reciprocal attachment, even if he were in reality prepared or inclined to make such an avowal. For only six weeks had passed since Angela had beheld the happiness which he experienced in the society of the being who at that time bore the name of Satanais: and therefore it would be indelicate and even insulting to address the forest-maiden in language of tenderness within so short an interval. Moreover, De Colmar was *not* prepared to make any avowal of that nature: and thus was his position in every way an awkward and an embarrassing one.

'Sweet sister,' he at length said, when he found that the violence of her grief was rapidly abating, 'I fully appreciate all the noble and generous friendship which you bear towards me—a friendship which I so unfeignedly and profoundly reciprocate. Nor do I feel less acutely than you the pain of separation where such friendship exists. Indeed, mine will be the more pitiable lot; for you depart to enter amidst the scenes of bustle and excitement,—whereas I must linger here for some

days yet, a prey to a monotony whence my soul already shrinks with horror. But for each of us there is the consolation that we shall meet again. Perhaps you will be enabled to return to me before I take leave of these ruins, and continue my journey homeward? If not, depend upon it, Angela—dear Angela—that within a few months I shall revisit these districts,—yes, on purpose to see you, and with no other aim——'

'Oh! I am not worthy of such generous conduct on your part!' exclaimed the heroine, her eyes brightening and her cheeks flushing with a pleasure which she could not conceal.

'Ye, you are worthy of any attention which it may be in my power to demonstrate towards you, dearest Angela,' said the Austrian knight, with a fervid enthusiasm vibrating in his voice and glowing upon his features; 'you are worthy of all the testimonials of gratitude which a man whose life you have many times saved, can possibly offer; you are worthy of being elevated to a rank, and endowed with a fortune, that will enable you to widen the sphere of your usefulness and confer additional benefits upon your fellow-creatures; and I can confidently promise you, my well beloved sister, that from the new Emperor of Germany I shall be enabled to obtain ample recognition of the services you have rendered to Sir Ernest de Colmar!'

'Oh! I seek not for wealth, I aspire not to rank,' murmured Angela, again trembling with undefinable and bewildering feelings as that reiteration of a language so lofty fell upon her ears with all the imposing effect of a cannon firing a salute. 'The moment that circumstances will permit,' she continued, 'I shall return to my forest-home; and under the roof and the care of my adopted parents shall I court the tranquil happiness of that humble sphere in which my lot has placed me. At the same time I return my heartfelt gratitude to your excellency for those generous intimations which you have thrown out, and for the kind views which you have entertained in my behalf.'

Thus speaking, she rose from the chair by the bedside; 'twas a signal that the instant for separation had come!

'Angela, I shall never, never forget all your kindness towards me,' said De Colmar, in a voice that was now deeply moved. 'But you, sweet maiden, shall you be happy when returning to that forest-home——'

'Oh! I trust in God to send me happiness,' exclaimed Angela, but with that shivering of the form and tightness at the heart which carried to her own soul the conviction that the hopes of her youth were entombed in the love which she bore for that man from whom she was about to separate—perhaps for ever!

'It would destroy my faith in heaven's justice and goodness, Angela,' said the knight, 'were you to experience a life of sorrow. No, such cannot, must not, shall not be the case!—God will shield thee from harm, thou heroic maiden; heaven will shower its blessings upon thine head, thou paragon of female excellence! And in the space of a few months, Angela, when the sunny smiles of Spring shall be wooing the groves to put forth their verdure, and the soft breath of April shall waft the song of the bird on its zephyr wing—*then*, dear Angela, mayst thou look forward to a visit from one who implores thee to regard him as a friend and a brother! Tell me, Angela, tell me, shalt thou be glad to behold me some day emerging from the depths of the forest, surprising thee at thy cottage-door, and proving to thee by my presence that I am no ingrate towards one whose memory I have every cause to cherish?'

But the maiden could give no verbal answer to the question thus put; her feelings were once more wrought up to an overpowering degree,—while the tears streamed down her cheeks like rain. Yet in the deep blush which mantled on those cheeks and in the tell-tale glance which beamed through those tears, was a response conveyed—a response ten thousand times more eloquent than if it had been shaped in words.

'Farewell, Sir Knight—farewell!' she at length sobbed forth. 'Pardon this weakness—this folly——'

'Oh! blame not yourself, dearest sister,' interrupted De Colmar, his own eyes becoming dimmed with tears.—'Farewell, my heroine-deliverer in danger, my angel-saviour in illness,—farewell, faruwell!'

And, seizing her hand, the knight pressed it to his lips.

For nearly a minute did the forest-maiden abandon that fair hand to the warrior's fervid grasp and warm caresses; then, suddenly recollecting her-

self, she drew it gently but firmly away; and, with a deep sob suffocating the farewell word to which she once more endeavored to give utterance, she rushed from the turret-chamber.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE SIEGE OF ALTENDORF CASTLE.

Yes, Famine was indeed doing its dark and terrible work within the walls of the beleaguered fortalice.

For five weeks had the siege now lasted; and during that interval not a grain of corn had been imported into the stronghold. But, on the other hand, we have seen that the provision-warehouses were destroyed by a desperate achievement on the part of the Captain General of the Taborites. This was a fatal blow to the aristocratic army; but the secret of the cruel result was kept as long as possible from the knowledge of the besiegers.

The Baron of Altendorf, Father Cyprian, Lord Rodolph, and the nobles who were acting in concert with them, justly imagined that no circumstances would induce the Taborites to raise the siege if they once learnt that famine must eventually compel a surrender; whereas, if a belief could be induced to the effect that the destruction of the provision warehouses led to no manner of inconvenience, and that there were ample supplies of provender of all kinds still left within the walls,—if such an impression could be spread abroad, we say, the defenders of Altendorf felt assured that Zitzka would not waste too much of his valuable time in a fruitless siege.

But the fatal secret could not long be kept. It oozed out through the medium of certain prisoners, taken in an onslaught upon the walls; and though the Taborites were beaten back upon this as on the former occasions, yet did they retire in the present instance with the assurance that famine was really at work within the precincts of Altendorf Castle.

And heaven knows that such was indeed the case! Rapidly from the fatal night when the corn magazine and the provision warehouses were destroyed, —rapidly, we say, did a more rigid economy become apparent in the distribution of the rations; then this economy merged into a sordid parsimony, until the officers had been compelled to confess to their soldiers the deplorable state of their resources. At first these tidings were received with an apparently cheerful resignation and a courageous submission to the force of circumstances and the chances of war: but then the intelligence had been communicated at a moment when the garrison was only experiencing the comparatively tolerable hardship of 'short commons,' and was not as yet practically acquainted with the pinching extreme of 'no bread.'

Therefore, when this last sad phase of affairs presented itself to their view, —when they were informed that the granaries were empty, that the oxen and the sheep were all consumed, and that the store keeper's situation had become a sinecure,—the soldiers threw sullen looks upon their officers, and exchanged sinister glances with each other. But as yet they spoke not out aloud, because they remembered that the horses in the stables would furnish food for several days; and the animals were accordingly slain to minister to the wants of the garrison.

But when this resource was exhausted—when even the very dogs within the precincts of the castle had been converted into human food—the soldiers assembled and demanded an interview with the Baron of Altendorf. This was immediately granted, and they required that he should place himself at their head, and lead them to cut their way through the Taborite army.

Vainly for some time did he remonstrate with them upon the desperate nature of their project; vainly did he assure them that they would be immolated to a man by overpowering numbers. Maddened by hunger, goaded almost to frenzy by the pinching poignancy of famine, and reckless of all consequences, they persisted in their wild scheme. But at that moment Father Cyprian appeared before them; and, pretending to have just received a supernatural intimation to the effect that speedy succor might be expected, he succeeded in calming the perturbed and menacing mind of the garrison. On the following day the Taborites renewed their attack upon the castle; the aristocratic soldiers fought desperately, and the besiegers were beaten back, leaving six or seven of their men in the hands of the garrison.

From one of these captives Father

Cyprian learnt the intelligence (which had lately reached the Taborite quarters) that the Emperor Sigismund was dead. The tidings were forthwith proclaimed to the whole garrison, accompanied by an assurance which Father Cyprian's inventive brain had supplied, and which was to the effect that a new emperor had already been elected, and was marching at the head of an immense army to the relief of Altendorf Castle, and to the espousal of the aristocratic cause against the Republican Reformers. This mendacious rumor was greedily swallowed by a horde of desperate men who were ready to catch at straws; and the soldiers vowed to submit to any privations rather than submit to the Taborites.

But the pressure of famine soon became horrible—horrible! Day after day and hour after hour were the Baron of Altendorf and the Carthusian priest compelled to circulate all kinds of reports in order to cheer the garrison.—Sometimes they had recourse to indirect intimidation, declaring that Zitzka had published decrees written in his own blood, and ordering no quarter to be given to any prisoners who might fall into the hands of the Taborites.—The result of this diabolical falsehood was to inspire the aristocratic soldiers with the courage of desperation, and make them not only defend the walls with fiend-like fury, but also put up as well as they were able with the awful pressure of want.

For the last week of the five during which the siege had now been continued, heaven only knows how the inmates of the castle subsisted! Even with the noble lords and high born dames it was a quarrelling for the mouldiest crusts that were raked up from corners and nooks—it was a constant groping here and there for anything in the shape of eatables—it was a scramble, a struggle, a conflict for the least morsel of food that could be found. All regard for rank, sex, and age was forgotten; dependants snatched the last mouthful from the grasp of their masters and mistresses; a horrible selfishness and an infernal egotism broke up all the decencies of society, and produced utter demoralization. To drown their miseries in forgetfulness, the haughtiest dames and the most lovely girls flew with avidity to the wine bin or the flask of strong waters; and, when wallowing in the filthy slough of drunkenness, they either voluntarily abandoned their persons to the lowest menials, or became an easy prey to the brutual lusts of a ferocious and maddened soldiery.

Among the garrison itself all discipline was at an end; and the men would have surrendered the castle to the Taborites, or sallied forth in the desperate hope of cutting their way through the besiegers, had it not been for the influence of the reports which Father Cyprian was constantly circulating throughout the stronghold. Through the same cause, also, and likewise inasmuch as famine had sharpened the bloody instincts of the soldiery into the savage ferocity of wolves, the walls were still defended with desperation whenever the Taborites mounted to the assault.

At length whispers of an appalling nature began to circulate throughout the castle; and those who listed to the tales that were thus breathed in subdued voices and horror-stricken tones were themselves paralyzed with a dread consternation. Men began to look sullenly and suspiciously upon each other—to avoid meeting only one or two together in dark places, and to walk about at night instead of repairing to the dormitories. A fearful sentiment had visibly stricken many in that doomed community; and with the rapidity of the pestilence was it spreading!

And soon, full soon, was the hideous terror realised; and the most damnable scene in the whole drama of mingled sadness and horror was placed upon the stage. The *Famine* had bred its invariable progeny; and *Cannibalism* was now raging, like a plague, throughout the vast stronghold of Altendorf.

Yes, this was indeed the case! The mangled remains of young children and of women were found in various parts of the castle; while the ferocious looks, the infernal recklessness, the ruffian-like desperation, and the insolent bravado of some of the nobles and many of the soldiers, stamped the Cain-brand upon those who had flown to this last and diabolical resource of human privation.

But none dared charge the cannibals with the deed; none ventured to accuse them with murder and anthropophagism! For all human ties were broken in that doomed castle by the hand of Famine; and there was no law now in force—no authority exercised by man—no fear entertained of God! The wretches who took the initiative in the work of cannibalism assumed that bold front and adopted that

horrible insolence which desperate ruffians are wont to call to their aid, when, finding themselves irresistibly goaded on to crime, they voluntarily take refuge in a savage cynicism.

At last, the five weeks of the siege being expired, and this period bringing us up to the end of the sixth week of Sir Ernest de Colmar's illness, as detailed in a recent chapter—at last, we say, the tidings of the horrible cannibalism which was now pursuing its hellish career within the walls of Altendorf, reached the ears of John Zitzka. Thereupon the Taborite chieftain was determined to strike a desperate blow at once in order to capture the castle, and thus put an end to a state of things which was shocking to humanity.

It was, then, upon the very day on which Angela Wildon bade farewell to Sir Ernest de Colmar—it was in the morning of this self-same day, we repeat, that a general movement was visible throughout the Taborite encampment stretched around the old castle of Altendorf. And soon the ramparts of the fatal stronghold were crowded with the cannibal defenders; and the war-cry rang with a wilder note, and the look of defiance was darted down with a more blood-shot ferociousness than on any previous occasion. The besieged appeared to have a presentiment that the final struggle was now at hand, and that the coming conflict must either result in their own destruction or in the utter defeat and flight of the army of Mount Tabor.

On the other hand, Zitzka and his host were resolute in bringing to an issue a struggle already too long protracted; and it was accordingly under such varied auspices and with such opposing presentiments as these, that the sanguinary conflict began.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE BATTLE.

The sun was bright and the heaven was stainlessly blue as the sky of a southern clime, when the warriors of Mount Tabor advanced in dense columns to attack the Castle of Altendorf on every point. Nor less was the golden flood which poured from the eastern horizon, reflected in the sheen of spears, and helms, and corselets, which covered the ramparts and towers of the mighty stronghold as with a coating of steel.

The Taborites marched forward in an array which seemed to be irresistible; but the besieged, goaded to desperation and almost maddened with hunger, fought as if inspired with the fury of fiends and animated with the strength of giants. On one side was John Zitzka leading the main body of his troops to the attack; on the other were the Baron of Altendorf and Lord Rodolph encouraging the garrison to the most resolute resistance. The assailants crossed the moat on rafts in some places; in others they dragged down numerous trees, felled in the adjacent forest, and with which they formed bridges to the foot of the castle wall; many daring Taborites plunged boldly into the water and swam across to some point where they distinguished a standing-place; and thus within two hours after sunrise the assault became general.

The scaling-ladders were raised once more against those lofty walls; and the same furious ardor of attack which we have described in a preceding chapter was now renewed, but only to experience the same indomitable vigor of defence. With spikes and spears did the soldiers on the ramparts form an impenetrable line; and then hand to hand and foot to foot raged the conflict for a while, till at length, about mid-day, the tremendous fury of the assault was broken and the Taborite warriors were driven like flocks of sheep over the ramparts.

But not once did John Zitzka lose his self-possession; not for an instant did he manifest bewilderment or irresolution. He saw his brave Taborites beaten back on every side—the stream of their power dashing itself fruitlessly against the walls of Altendorf—the torrent of their mighty numbers broken into myriads of ineffectual waves instead of overwhelming everything with one tremendous billow: all this he saw, and yet he despaired not! For he knew that the temporary success obtained by the besieged had cost them dear, very dear; and he was moreover aware that their desperate condition would prompt, or rather compel them, to hazard everything upon the die that was now cast. Nor did he calculate thus in vain; for when his own troops were driven back from the walls, forced to abandon point after point, and constrained to retreat in the best manner they could, the soldiers of the garrison

insisted upon being led forth in pursuit of the flying reformers. To this demand the Baron of Altendorf, though fearful of the consequences, was compelled to submit; and the entire aristocratic army sallying out of the castle, the conflict was renewed in the fields, the gardens, the roads, and the forest, which lay around the ancient stronghold.

And now was it that Zitzka's skill as a commander shone to such transcendant advantage. Taking his stand upon an elevation, he thence despatched a dozen pages, one after another, to all points where his troops were either flying, rallying, pausing, or remaining in uncertainty how to act; and so lucid as well as so positive were the instructions which the captain-general thus sent to the various officers in command of those corps and detachments, that a new spirit appeared to be suddenly infused into the whole Taborite army. Here columns, a moment before broken up and flying in confusion, suddenly rallied and took up a position on some eminence; there divisions, not knowing what course to pursue, were all in an instant rescuing themselves from confusion and looking their dangers boldly in the face. Discipline, order, and a spirit of reorganization seized upon the myriads like a wholesome spell suddenly counteracting an evil one; and in an incredibly short space the Taborite battle-array was formed around three sides of Altendorf Castle.

And now the conflict recommenced outside the walls; and clouds of smoke and dust soon enveloped the combatants. The flashes of the artillery resembled the dartings of vivid lightning through a dense sulphurous cloud; and the succdeeing roar of the dread ordnance, reverberating through the depths of the forest and amidst the buildings of the castle, sounded like the thunder-voices in which the storms of heaven speak in the sublime and awful periods of elemental war.

But darker and deeper raged the conflict wherever the plume of the formidable Zitzka was seen breaking through the smoke of the cannon or waving to and fro amidst the desperate strife of furious multitudes. Nothing could equal the courage with which he fought, the strength with which he dashed aside all impediments to his course, the annihilating power with which he clave for himself a bloody pathway through the ranks of battle. Heaps of the dying and the dead were the ghastly trophies of this terrible progress; and his steed, as it thundered on amidst the contending cohorts, seemed gifted with the same invulnerable power which characterised the hero who bestrode that gallant charger.

Nor less did the Baron of Altendorf and Lord Rodolph bear themselves bravely in the mortal contest. The form of the younger noble appeared to dilate in size and assume a heroic dignity as he spurred his steed into the thickest of the fight, with the hardy resolution of opposing himself hand to hand against the Captain-General of the Reformers.

They met,—the stripling champion of Bohemia's aristocratic cause, and the sturdy chieftain of the Taborites!—Yes, they met; but scarcely had they looked each other in the face, scarcely had their weapons crossed, when Zitzka's mighty sword dashed Rodolph's brand from his comparatively feeble grasp. The Baron of Altendorf, instantaneously perceiving that his son was at the mercy of John Zitzka, dashed the rowels into the sides of his war-steed and urged the animal in thundering career against the charger bestridden by the Captain-General. But immoveable as a rock was the noble animal that bore the chieftain of the Taborites; and this redoubtable warrior with one blow of his two-handed sword struck the Baron of Altendorf from his horse.

The next moment this proud peer and Lord Rodolph were both prtsoners in the hands of the Taborites.

The news of their capture spread like wild fire throughout the ranks of both armies, infusing a still more determined spirit into the breasts of the reformers, and throwing a damp upon all the energies of the aristocratic forces. At the moment that the desperate, famine-stricken warriors of the garrison were charging the Taborites with whirlwind fury, when blood was being poured forth like water. and human life was dealt with as if it were the mere hewing down of noxious weeds in a garden; when valor was exerting all its energies, and prowess distinguishing itself with mighty achievements; and when the demon of slaughter was displaying all the ghastlier phases of his accursed craft, and the voice of battle was roaring in all its most terrific tones, at this instant was it that the intelligence of the capture of the baron and his son

struck such consternation *there*, and pro duced such a general exultation *here*.

Then paralyzed became the arm upraised to deal the blow of death, and in its wild career the foaming war-steed was suddenly reined in. Then, too, from the hand which erst had reared it proudly, fell the royal standard of Bohemia—that banner which the aristocracy had still maintained, although the queen was dead; and then, likewise, did a sense of famine strike with a more poignant agony into the heart of desperation.

But, on the other hand, the banner of Mount Tabor now pressed resolutely on; and the weapon of the mighty Zitzka continued to deal annihilation amid the opening ranks of his enemies. On, on swept the serried bands of reformers; on, on went the raging phalanxes in pursuit of the flying foe; on, on thundered the heavy horse—on, on the light armed cavalry. Front and flank sweep the Taborite legions; and irreparable becomes the confusion amidst the mass of aristocratic warriors who have no longer a general to guide, to encourage, nor to save them. The rout becomes universal, the famine-stricken soldiers of the garrison fall over each other in dismay, and those who had a few hours previously sallied forth with such elevated hopes and such burning aspirations from Altendorf Castle, were now glad to retreat thither and thus save themselves from the gleaming weapons of the infuriate Taborites.

In that wild moment of their despair the flying servitors of the ruined cause of aristocracy remembered not that in thus hastening back to shut themselves up in Altendorf, they were only about to look in the face of famine more hideous than aught they had yet beholden. Unmindful or oblivious of that one tremendous fact, they rushed pell-mell towards the castle,—some gaining the drawbridge, others swimming the moat, and many flinging themselves upon the rafts which the Taborites had been compelled to abandon in the morning. Hundreds and hundreds were overtaken and slain, countless numbers had previously fallen on the battle-field; and of all the mighty host which lately called the Lord of Altendorf its commandant, not a thousand men succeeded in regaining the interior of that stronghold which had been so well defended until this fatal day.

Easy were it for John Zitzka then to have carried the assault against this feeble, broken, stricken few; and within another hour the Taborite standard might have waved above the haughty parapets of Altendorf. But enough blood had been shed that day, and even Zitzka, inured to scenes of slaughter though he were, sickened at the idea of suffering his soldiery to penetrate into the castle, until the wild spirit of revenge which now lashed them almost into a fury should have subsided. He, moreover, knew that, holding in his power the Baron of Altendorf, Lord Rodolph, and several other nobles, together with countless prisoners of a lower rank, he could easily and at any moment dictate his own terms to the few poor fugitives who had thrown themselves back again into the stronghold and locked its gates in despair,—and thus, prompted by the generous feelings of his nature, now that the fatal exigencies of war demanded not the further shedding of blood, the Taborite hero commanded his victorious troops to retire to their encampment.

The sun was setting behind the western hills as the triumphant Reformers obeyed the instructions which their Captain-General despatched by his pages and squires to every post and section of his army. But, oh! what a scene did the retiring cohorts leave behind them. The fields, the gardens, the banks of the moat, and the outskirts of the forest, were covered with the grim and ghastly dead, for the wounded and the dying were already removed into hospital tents by the benevolent commands of John Zitzka.

On the countenance of innumerable bodies played the last beams of the setting sun; and as the lowest of those rays penetrated with a prismatic effect through the foliage of the forest, the violet, orange, and crimson hues with which they lighted the faces of the dead, enhanced the hideous ghastliness of the scene.

Many war steeds which had lost their riders, or had broken loose from the Taborite stables, thundered madly over the field, galloping hither end thither as if possessed by demons,—now pausing to plunge as if greedy to trample on the helpless dead, once their masters armed with whip and spur, then starting in sudden alarm, tossing their heads, and snorting, as the ravenous vulture and the carrion-crow swept past to feast upon the tremendous banquet which the ready hand of war's dire genius had thus tossed out.

In wild disorder, amidst the corpses that lay so ghastly there, were scattered all the symbols and implements of deadly strife, some whole, some broken, some still bright, and others still stained with the crimson tide of life. Swords and lances, spears and shields, helmets and breast-plates, hackbuts and petronels, banners and pennons—all, all were spread in utter confusion there! But, worse—oh! ten thousand times worse than these, was the spectacle of large pools of blood upon the ground, and of clots of gore mingling with brains battered out, and crushed bones protruding from the skin, and lumps of human flesh cut off.

Add to all these hideous appearances the deep furrows ploughed up in the earth by the cannon-balls, the ruts made by the wheels of the gun-carriages. and the myriad marks of footsteps in the gardens and the fields, then the trees of the forest which had been hewn down, and those which were gashed by glancing weapons or stricken by artillery—yes, all these appearances added to those before depicted, and the result will be a pretty accurate idea of the aspect of the battle-ground at that sunset hour.

But ah! over this field so strewed with ghastly trophies of the fight, amid the corpses which encumber and the weapons that cover the ground, with the last straggling beams of sunset playing upon her lovely countenance, and with her person enveloped in a cloak, the charming forest maiden, Angela Wildon, slowly and timidly pursues her way!

CHAPTER XCIII.

ANGELA AND THE TABORITES.

Yes, 'tis indeed she, that admirable heroine who only a few hours back took leave of Sir Ernest de Colmar—tore herself away from the side of his invalid couch, in order to perform another act of beneficence and generosity, which her noble nature prompted and her dauntless courage inspired her to carry out!

But oh! what horrified feelings filled her soul—feelings commingled with an immense pity—as she trod amidst the dead and the relics of the fight; and such a sickening sensation crept over her, that she more than once closed her eyes to shut out the dread spectacle—yes, and more than once, when reeling beneath the influence of over wrought emotions, paused to lean against the stump of a hewn tree or a broken gun-carriage for support.

In a few minutes she found herself face to face with a Taborite sentinel, from whose halbred the beams of the sinking sun were brightly reflected.

'Who art thou, gentle one?' demanded the soldier.

'I am not an enemy in disguise,' was the response, delivered in the sweetest tones of Angela's musical voice; and she displayed the ring which Sir Ernest de Colmar had given her, and which he himself had originally received from John Zitzka.

'Pass!' was the laconic ejaculation which fell from the lips of the Taborite sentinel as the jewel flashed before his eyes.

And Angela, overjoyed at this successful trial of the talismanic properties of the ring, pursued her way over the battle field, amidst the corpses—amidst the pools of blood—amidst the broken weapons and battered armor that strewed the ground.

Another sentinel was encountered and passed; a third, a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth, all were satisfied by the production of the ring, the influence of which produced an instantaneous effect upon them. And now the forest maiden gained the Taborite encampment which she skirted with rapid steps, pursuing her way towards the little chapel which stood in that part of the forest that extended up to the right wing of Altendorf Castle.

She gained that little chapel at length—she entered it, and she knelt down to return thanks to heaven for having conducted her thus far in safety. But the crucifix had been removed from the miniature altar in that place: the hand of the Taborite had withdrawn the symbol of the Catholic faith. Nevertheless, Angela Wildon prayed fervently to the deity whom she worshipped, and poured forth her gratitude to the guardian saint in whom she reposed her confidence; and then, rising from her knees, she looked searchingly around to ascertain if her movements were espied.

The interior of the chapel, which was merely about three or four yards in extent, was lighted only by the flickering beams that penetrated from the western horizon through the trees, which had

surrendered much of their foliage to the approaching winter. The place was not therefore so completely involved in obscurity as to prevent Angela from examining either its interior or its immediate vicinity outside; and having assured herself that she was unobserved, she stooped down to discover if possible the trap-door which communicated with the vaulted passages leading into the awful subterraneans of the Castle of Altendorf.

Beneath her cloak she had a parcel which she deposited upon the pavement while she thus searched for the trap-door. Several minutes elapsed, and not a trace of that trap-door could she discover. Well she knew that it fitted into the floor with admirable ingenuity, for this passing observation she had made when the White Lady conducted her thence, on that occasion the details of which our readers cannot have forgotten. Yes, well aware was Angela that every precaution shielded this trap-door from the chances of discovery; but she did not anticipate so much difficulty in finding it.

But even if she could succeed in ascertaining which stone it was that served as the trap-door, how could she open it? This question had the maiden asked herself more than once while wending her way thither that day; but she had noticed, on the former occasion above alluded to, that there was some secret spring outside, or rather above, as well as beneath the particular stone; and hope—that fervid feeling which animates heroism with its spirit—had buoyed her up with the idea that she would not be baffled in her search for the means of opening the trap-door.

Alas! that hope was gradually disappearing; ten minutes had elapsed, and still was the anxious Angela straining with her eyes and feeling with her hands to discover the secret avenue of communication with those subterraneans into which she was so desirous to penetrate. The obscurity of evening was deepening around her; darker were growing the shades of the forest outside the chapel, and more intense became the gloom within. What could she do? To procure a light appeared impossible, and yet how was she to continue her search in the pitchy darkness that in a few minutes would envelope her?

Suddenly she heard voices in the forest. Starting from her stooping posture, Angela listened with the most breathless attention.

'Which is the next post to be relieved?' demanded a voice, speaking in a tone of authority. 'Is there no watch kept in this part of the forest?'

'It is usual, captain, to place a sentinel during the night in a little chapel which there is close by,' was the response, delivered in a respectful manner; and as this brief dialogue was immediately followed by the trampling of several footsteps, Angela was at no loss to comprehend that the relieving guard was approaching.

Retreating into the farthest corner of the little chapel, and crouching down, she hoped to escape observation; if not, she trusted to the talismanic ring which De Colmar had given her, to help her out of any embarrassment into which she might become temporarily involved.

Scarcely had she retired into the darkest nook of the chapel, when a stream of light was thrown across the entrance; and the foremost soldier of the Taborite guard appeared upon the threshold, bearing a pine-torch in his hand. The glare illumined the whole place; and, as the man casually glanced around, he instantaneously beheld Angela Wildon.

'Ah! whom have we here?' he cried, advancing into the chapel as he spoke; and at the same instant the captain of the guard, with a dozen followers, appeared at the open entrance-way.

'I am an inhabitant of this district, and am no enemy to the Taborites,' said Angela, coming forward, and speaking with a modest dignity which instantaneously won for her the respect of the honest Republican soldiers; and at the same time the ring upon her finger flashed like a meteor in the torch-light.

'Question the damsel not, and let her go her ways in peace,' exclaimed the captain of the guard. 'She wears a talisman which is superior to all the instructions that sentinels have to fulfil ——'

'Heavens! is it possible!' suddenly ejaculated one of the private soldiers forming the guard; and rushing forward, he gazed for a few moments with an intent earnestness upon Angela's countenance.

It immediately struck the forest-maiden that the man's features were not altogether unfamiliar to her; but where she had seen them before, or under what circumstances, she could not for the life of her remember. Not long, however, was she suffered to re-

main in any uncertainty upon this point; for the individual himself soon cleared up the mystery.

'Yes, by heaven! 'tis the same countenance!' he cried, in a tone of wild astonishment. 'I should know it again at the end of the world, despite of any disguise——yes, it is the same——and yet a woman!—whereas I took you, fair one, for a page——Oh! you became that armor marvellously well, lovely but perfidious creature that you are!'

'What do you mean? who is this young female?' demanded the captain of the guard, surprised and angry at the apparent rudeness with which the soldier was gazing upon Angela, as well as the incomprehensible ejaculations to which the man was giving utterance.

'Who is she?' exclaimed the individual, 'If she be not the same who tricked me when I was mounting guard over the three State Prisoners in the Castle of Prague——'

'What! a woman rescued those prisoners?' interrupted the captain, 'it is impossible! You are dreaming, my good friend.'

'Let the young damsel deny it if she can,' exclaimed the Taborite soldier.—'I will swear to her countenance at any time, by any light, and under any circumstances.'

'Well, in good sooth, it is not one of those faces which, once seen, can be readily forgotten,' observed the captain, then perceiving that the compliment to which he thus gave utterance with so much honest sincerity, had covered Angela with confusion, he said, 'Pardon me, fair damsel, if I have given thee offence. Even without that ring on thy finger, shouldst thou command my respect; but more particularly with that gem flashing before my eyes, art thou entitled to courteous treatment. What say you, then, to the charge which my follower here makes against you?'

'I cannot deny the truth of the allegation,' responded Angela, in a murmuring tremulousness. 'But, if there be any virtue left in this ring, I beseech you to suffer me to depart hence.'

'Nay, that must not be, fair maiden; and more's the pity that it must not,' observed the captain. 'For, look you, the commands of our glorious Captain-General have recently modified the influence which was originally attached to that ring; and this circumstance arose from a report having been duly made to him in respect to the use and purpose to which the ring was turned some six or seven weeks ago, when the knight who wore it at that time prevented the arrest——'

'Of this very damsel when disguised in the steel armor,' interjected the Taborite soldier, whose recognition of Angela now threatened her with somewhat unpleasant circumstances. 'It appears,' continued the man, 'that the arrest took place at some way-side inn, and that when a certain Sir Ernest de Colmar insisted upon urging the authority of the ring on the prisoner's behalf, the venerable magistrate who was present on the occasion, liberated his captive.'

'Yes, such were the facts which reached my ears, also,' said the Taborite captain; 'and as the authority of the ring was in that instance turned to a purpose never contemplated by the noble Zitzka—namely, the perversion of justice—it hath since been decreed that in no wise shall the influence of the ring interfere with warrants legally issued for the arrest of offenders. Therefore, my poor young woman,' added the officer, in a tone of profound commiseration, 'I have no alternative but to make thee my prisoner, and escort thee at once into the presence of the captain-general.'

'Be it so,' said the forest-maiden, resigning herself with all the courage of a heroine to whatsoever destiny might be in store for her. 'The chieftain of the reformers is chivalrous and noble-hearted, and I will throw myself upon his mercy! Lead the way, sir, I am prepared to follow.'

Thus speaking, with that calm dignity which intimated more eloquently than ten thousand tongues could have succeeded in doing, that there was no necessity to lay the hands of coercion upon her, Angela Wildon moved forward.

'Hah! what have we here?' exclaimed the Taborite captain, who had just kicked against the parcel which the maiden had deposited on the pavement, and which she had forgotten to take up when suddenly disturbed by the arrival of the guard. 'Stop one moment. continued the officer; 'we must examine this packet. It grieves me, gentle damsel, thus to treat thee,' he added, turning towards our heroine: 'but my duty rides paramount over my inclinations.'

'Perform your duty, sir,' said the maiden, in a voice of calm dignity. 'I am already grateful to you for the evi-

dent compassion which marks your manner towards me.'

'The captain bowed and then proceeded to open the parcel. It contained a complete suit of female apparel, belonging to the peasant class, and also some provisions. There was nothing in these simple articles, which any female wayfarer might possess, to engender ulterior suspicions in the minds of the Taborite soldiers; they accordingly re-fastened the packet and returned it to Angela.

'And now please to accompany me, young damsel,' said the captain, at the same time intimating by a signal to the soldiers of the guard that they need not follow too closely behind; for the officer, who was a kind-hearted man, was anxious to spare the maiden's feelings as much as possible, and omit all unnecessary ceremony in escorting her to the pavilion of the captain-general.

Entering the encampment, they threaded its mazes of tents all arranged like the streets of a vast town, and illuminated by the fires at which the culinary process was going on in preparation for the evening meal. The captain acknowledged the salute of the sentinels who were passed; and Angela kept close to his side, her heart agitated with a variety of conflicting feelings.

At length the pavilion of the Taborite chieftain was reached; and, in reply to the demands of Angela's guide, the sentinels posted at the entrance of the spacious tent declared that the captain general was within, and likewise alone at the moment.

The velvet curtain which closed the door-way of the pavilion was drawn aside, and the captain-general of the Taborites rose from a table at which he was seated, when, by the light of the lamp that burned within the tent, he saw that a young female was being conducted into his presence.

Angela Wildon had seen the mighty Zitzka when, as Gloria's guest, she was an inmate of the Castle of Prague; but never had she before been so close to him as now she stood. The furtive and anxious glance which she threw up at the countenance of the grim warrior was indeed little calculated to inspire her with much confidence; for the expression of his features was usually stern and severe, and the thought of the ocean of blood that was shed that day, had excited in his mind painful ponderings which were now reflected in his countenance. Nevertheless, Angela was not disheartened; for she had already determined upon the course which she should pursue.

'What requirest thou of me, young damsel?' said the captain-general of the glorious republican reformers; and as he spoke, he threw into his voice as much kindness as possible—for there was something in the features of Angela Wildon which instantaneously touched his soul and enlisted all his feelings in her favor.

'The young woman is a prisoner, may it please you, general,' said the captain of the guard.

'A prisoner!' exclaimed Zitzka, with evident surprise. 'Is it possible that a damsel of such gentle mien and pleasing aspect can be in any way dangerous to the interests of Mount Tabor?'

'And yet, mighty chief,' said the captain, 'this prepossessing damsel, a single hair of whose head I would not injure for worlds, is a heroine of no common order.'

'The sentiment of leniency and mercy, which thou didst utter parenthetically, was most honorable to thine heart, good friend,' observed John Zitzka. 'But wherefore hast thou brought this damsel before me?'

'In the full conviction that you, general, will accord her some of thine admiration, even while visiting her with thy blame,' said the good-natured captain, 'I no longer hesitate to inform thee that the crime wherewith my prisoner now stands charged, is that of having rescued the Baron of Altendorf, the Marquis of Schomberg, and the Count of Rosenberg from the Castle of Prague.'

'What!' exclaimed the captain-general of the Taborites, mingled amazement, incredulity, and admiration being suddenly depicted on his countenance; 'was it indeed a *heroine*, and not a *hero*, who accomplished that adventure?'

'The damsel will not deny a feat of which, so far as its valor is concerned, she may well be proud,' observed the captain of the guard, who lost no opportunity of putting in a word on Angela's behalf.

'Is this true, young woman?' demanded Zitzka, a deeper and more tender interest flashing in his one eye as he fixed it earnestly upon her.

'Such, illustrious chief, is indeed the truth,' responded Angela, her countenance suffused with burning blushes.

'And tell me, thou charming plotter against the interests of my government,

said Zitzka, his features so far relaxing into a smile that it became satisfactorily evident to the good-hearted captain of the guard that Angela's pardon was safe, 'tell me, I ask, what motive induced thee to run the risk and venture upon the difficulties of such an enterprise?'

'I am well aware, great chief, that you have every right to question your prisoner, and that if I expect leniency at your hands I am bound to reply,' said Angela, in a tremulous tone, and with looks upraised appealingly; 'but I may not respond to that query which you have put to me.'

'Then doubtless wast thou enamored of one of those nobles whom I imprisoned?' observed the captain-general, the smile brightening still more decidedly upon his features.

'No—such was not the inducement,' said Angela, suddenly drawing herself up and speaking with a dignity and firmness which augmented the admiration Zitzka already experienced with regard to her general tone and bearing.

'Well, I will not press thee upon that point, maiden,' he observed. 'But under what circumstances has the damsel been arrested this evening?' he demanded, turning towards the captain of the guard.

'May it please you, general,' was the reply, 'I found her in that little chapel which stands embowered in the portion of the forest stretching towards the right wing of the castle.'

'What wast thou doing within the precincts of the encampment, maiden?' inquired Zitzka; 'and how came you to pass the sentinels whose posts you must have cleared in order to reach that point?'

'The damsel wears your own ring, general,' said the captain of the guard, interposing the observation with a voice and manner profoundly respectful.

'Yes, and by virtue of that ring do I demand a boon at your hands, illustrious chieftain?' exclaimed Angela, displaying the brilliant gem which had proved her passport into the lines of the Taborite army.

'My ring! the jewel which I gave to the Austrian!' exclaimed Zitzka, struck with amazement. 'How is this? what connexion, damsel, subsists between thee and that illustrious man?'

'The understanding of friendship,' was the reply. 'And it is because he esteems me as a brother should cherish a sister, that he gave me this ring as a talismanic auxiliary to a certain purpose I had in view.'

'And that purpose?' continued Zitzka, interrogatively.

'Was to penetrate into Altendorf Castle,' returned Angela. 'You perceive, mighty warrior, that I answer your questions with frankness.'

'Candor is stamped upon every lineament of your countenance, young damsel,' said the Taborite chieftain; then, after a few moments' consideration, he signalled to the captain of the guard to retire.

That officer accordingly withdrew, followed by a look of gratitude from Angela, who failed not to appreciate the generous under-current of pleading which he had adopted in her behalf, when introducing her to the Captain General.

'Now we are alone, young woman, and you can speak more freely,' resumed this mighty chieftain. 'Around you there hangs an evident mystery, which some irresistible mystery prompts me to penetrate? Who are you, then, that you should have risked your very life to rescue the State Prisoners from the Castle of Prague? how came you to enjoy the friendship of that illustrious Austrian who gave you the ring? and wherefore have you this evening sought to penetrate into the Castle of Altendorf?'

'In serial reply to your three questions, great chieftain,' said the forest-maiden, 'I must state first, that I am the adopted daughter of a certain homely but kind hearted couple dwelling in this forest, and that the name by which I am known is Angela Wildon.'

'Angela Wildon!' exclaimed Zitzka; 'surely I have heard that name before? Ah! I remember—it must have been you, young woman, whom Sir Ernest de Colmar rescued from the waters of the Moldau, and whom the Lady Gloria made her guest for a few days in the Castle of Prague?'

'I am that same Angela Wildon,' said the forest-maiden; 'and now the *second* query put to me by your lips, great warrior, is also answered; for, since you are aware that Sir Ernest de Colmar saved my life, you may imagine how that incident led to an acquaintance which circumstances have ripened into friendship. Your *third* question related to Altendorf Castle, and I reply—frankly reply—that there is within those walls a lady in whom I feel profoundly interested—a lady to whom I hoped to

convey not only these provisions for her immediate comfort, but also this disguise to enable her to quit that appalling scene of famine, horror, and wretchedness.'

Thus speaking, Angela Wildon emptied the contents of her parcel at Zitzka's feet.

'Excellent young woman, how generous is thine heart! how heroic is thy conduct!' exclaimed the Captain-General, in a perfect enthusiasm of admiration. 'But who is this lady that hath thus interested thee? She must be an estimable woman indeed, to have obtained so firm a hold of the sympathies of such as thou! Tell me, then, who she is—and without an instant's delay will I send a herald to proclaim a safe and secure egress for her, should she choose to avail herself of that passport and quit the famine-stricken stronghold. Nay, more, I will guarantee to her a full and complete forgiveness for the past, however deeply she may have intrigued against the Taborite dominion, and however strenuously she may have abetted the cause of a royalty now defunct and an aristocracy whose last hopes were ruined on this day's battle-field. Tell me, then, young damsel, who is the lady that hath won thy regards, for right anxious am I to render thee a service by showing leniency towards thy friend.'

'O, generous warrior—as noble-hearted as thou art brave—as merciful as thou art valorous!' exclaimed Angela, the tears of gratitude rolling down her cheeks: 'great indeed is the favor which thou has proposed to confer upon me, and by the proffer of which thou hast anticipated the boon that I was about to supplicate at thine hands. And yet, O mighty chieftain! am I now more than ever the prey to a strong bewilderment and cruel perplexity; for I know nothing—absolutely nothing—of the lady in whom my soul's tenderest feelings are so profoundly interested! Her name, her rank, the nature of the misfortunes which envelop her doom in so dense a mystery—all, all are unknown to me; and even should I now hesitate to venture upon the most distant allusion to her, were it not for a frightful presentiment which haunts me like a spectre, and depicts that lady in the endurance of of all the poignant miseries attendant upon famine!'

'Your words are full of mystery and darkness to me, Angela,' said Zitzka, astonished at the strange and even apparently wild manner in which the forest-maiden had been speaking. 'Where dwells this unknown friend of thine? and by what denomination shall my herald describe her to the insurgents who still hold Altendorf Castle?'

'Oh! generous chief, pardon me if I am doing wrong——and thou, too, O lady, in whose behalf I am now taking this grand responsibility on myself——pardon me, I say,' exclaimed Angela, her whole frame trembling with excitement; 'for heaven knows that I am acting for the best!'

Then taking the little velvet bag from her bosom, she opened it and drew forth the ring which the White Lady had given her; and, falling upon her knees at the feet of the captain-general of the Taborites, she held the jewel towards him, murmuring in a tone tremulous with anxiety as to the result of her proceeding—'A secret voice whispers in my soul that this ring will tell thee more than my tongue can explain!'

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen by Zitzka's side, it would not have produced upon him an effect more startling than that ring which he snatched—greedily snatched—from Angela's hand. A single glance was sufficient to show him that it was indeed a ring which he had seen before; and all in an instant did a thousand tender associations flame up in his memory and illume in his mind all the incidents of the past, as a lamp suddenly lights up every feature of a cavern gemmed with stalactites.

'Angela, speak—hold me not in suspense,' exclaimed Zitzka, in a broken voice, while his whole frame trembled with a powerful excitement—'the lady who gave you that ring——lives she still?'

'She lives, a voluntary prisoner in the deep and dreadful subterraneans of Altendorf,' replied the forest-maiden, in a solemn tone.

'My God! she lives—she lives!' murmured Zitzka, clasping his hands together in a violent paroxysm of emotion; then, as an idea struck across his mind like a flash of lightning, he sprang towards Angela, seized her by the hand, raised her from the suppliant posture which she still retained, and, while examining her features with the most earnest attention, exclaimed, 'Yes—Oh! yes, it must be so! This resemblance ——But let me not remain in suspense! Maiden, didst thou ever know thy parents?'

'Never,' responded Angela, trembling all over with the undefinable emotions of one who feels that she is standing upon the verge of some discovery of stupendous importance. 'I was left in my infancy to the care of that honest couple of whom I have ere now spoken——'

'And thine age—thine age?' cried Zitzka, his excitement now wrought up to the highest pitch.

'I am twenty-three,' was the answer, delivered in a tone that vibrated like a note of melody upon the gale.

'Oh! then it must be so!' exclaimed Zitzka, in a tone of mingled exultation, wonderment, and feeling. 'Yes—nature herself prompts me——I understand all——Oh! come to my arms, Angela; for, as sure as there is a God who hath thus thrown us together, thou art my own child, and I am thy father, beloved girl!'

'My father!' crid Angela Wildon, indescribable sensations seizing upon her; and the next moment she flew into the arms of the mighty Zitzka, the captain-general of the Taborites.

CHAPTER XCIV.

A LAST VISIT TO THE SUBTERRANEANS.

Half an hour after the scene which we have just described, Zitzka and Angela issued forth together from the pavilion. The former was muffled in an ample military cloak, and wore a velvet cap with a sable plume, which shaded his countenance; while the forest maiden was enveloped in her mantle.—Hastily did they traverse the encampment, and in a short time they reached the little chapel to which allusion has already been so frequently made.

The sentinel who was on duty at this point happened to be the very one that had ere now recognised Angela Wildon, and instantaneously perceiving by Zitzka's manner towards her, that she was in high favor with the Captain General, the poor wretch began to shake and tremble lest she should seek some means of avenging herself against him for having denounced her as the liberatrix of the State Prisoners. But Angela, who penetrated his thoughts the moment she cast her looks upon his terrified countenance, gave him a reassuring glance, and the man's features brightened up.

A pine torch was burning in an iron ring projecting from the wall and, taking the light in his hand, Zitzka proceeded to scrutinize the floor of the chapel with the utmost attention.—Stooping down, he passed the torch slowly over the pavement, so as to fling its beams upon the lines formed by the joints of the flagstones; but such was the uniformity of the pavement, at least in appearance, that he was as much baffled in his search as Angela had previously been.

'Are you sure, my dear child,' he demanded, in a whispering tone, 'that it was here you emerged from the subterraneans of Altendorf Castle, on the occasion which you have explained to me?'

'I am confident beyond all possibility of mistake, beloved father,' replied Angela. 'The trap-door is assuredly there——'

'May it not have been hermetically fastened as a precaution, at the commencement of the siege?' inquired Zitzka.

The feasibility of this conjecture instantaneously struck upon Angela's mind; and she was about to ask of her newly-found sire what course he now proposed to pursue, when the Taborite sentinel suddenly advanced from the threshold into the interior of the chapel.

'Wherefore do you thus accost us?' demanded Zitzka, who saw by the man's air that he had something to communicate.

'Pardon me, General,' was the response, 'but it is not difficult to perceive that you are searching for some object which you have not as yet found. And if I may judge by the peculiar manner of that search, it is for a secret spring or a trap-door in the pavement.'

'How is it possible that you could have gleaned this much from the manner of my search?' demanded the Captain General. 'It is true that I took no pains to conceal my purpose from your observation; but at the same time I cannot understand how thou hast so readily seized upon a clue to my proceedings. Speak frankly——'

'I have no cause to do otherwise, great chieftain,' exclaimed the soldier, 'The truth is, then, that about ten days—or rather ten nights—ago, I was on duty here as I am this evening. But there was no pine torch burning within the chapel; and outside the flood of moonlight was so pure and powerful

that it penetrated the foliage of the forest, and streamed through the open entrance-way. But being somewhat fatigued with the part I had taken in a skirmish in the morning, I came and sate down on the steps of this little altar. Now, be so kind as to observe, general, that as the moonlight poured in through the small open door way, it irradiated the middle of the chapel and the opposite wall, but left the extremity where the altar stands, and likewise the other end, in total darkness. Consequently, as I sate on the altar steps I was enveloped in obscurity. Well, most honored chief,' continued the soldier, 'I was seated on the steps in the manner described, wondering how long the besieged could possibly hold out, and whether we should reduce them by famine or carry the castle by storm——'

'Yes, yes, you were thinking of all this,' interrupted Zitzka, impatiently. 'Well, what happened?'

'I had fallen, may it please you, general, into a very profound reverie,' continued the Taborite, 'when a strange noise suddenly started me, and raising my eyes, I saw a human form rising as it were from the bowels of the earth into the midst of the silver flood glowing in at the entrance. The appearance of the individual was that of a pale, thin, white-haired old man, with overhanging brows, sharp and piercing eyes, which threw a hundred restless glances about him all in an instant——

'Ah! 'twas old Hubert, the castle steward!' exclaimed Angela. 'The description is unmistakeable.'

'And yet I can assure you, lady,' continued the Taborite soldier, 'that I only beheld the individual for a few moments; but then the circumstance was so fraught with poignant terror at the instant, that it is no wonder if the face thus abruptly appearing before me became as vividly impressed upon my mind as if I had contemplated it calmly and deliberately for an hour.'

'It disappeared, then, almost instantaneously?' said Zitzka, making the remark in an interrogative sense.

Yes, it disappeared,' responded the soldier, 'because when the first feeling of utter consternation was past, I gave vent to my terror in a loud cry. Then the white-haired old man sank down again into the earth, and his disappearance was followed by the sudden din of a heavy weight falling. Now, I am no coward——'

'You speak truly, friend,' observed Zitzka, 'for I have marked thee in the fight. But proceed.'

'Thanking you, general, for the kind notice you have deigned to take of me,' continued the sentinel, 'I will hasten to make an end of my tale. I was saying that I am naturally no coward; but I must confess that this adventure bewildered me strangely. I rubbed my eyes to convince myself that I was awake; and then I examined the pavement by the clear moonlight. But there was not a sign nor a trace to mark the spot where the white-headed old man had appeared and disappeared,—and I, therefore, came to the conclusion that I had either seen a ghost or was the object of my own fancy's delusion. Under this impression I kept the matter secret, for I did not choose to become the laughing-stock of my companions. Next morning I returned hither and examined the pavement by the broad day-light; but nothing could I discover in connection with the incident which I have related. I, therefore, became confirmed in my belief that the occurrence was either a supernatural or else an ideal one.'

'And is that all you have to tell us?' demanded Zitzka, evidently disappointed at not receiving some clearer information relative to the mysterious trap-door.

'I did but pause to take breath, general,' resumed the Taborite sentinel, whose manner of telling his tale was most vexatiously prolix. 'For I was going on to observe that when I found just now that I was to occupy this post again for three hours to-night, you may readily believe I was not over well pleased; but pride or shame, I do not exactly know which, made me hold my tongue. However, the instant I was left alone by the guard, I could not help examining the pavement-door in the very spot where it struck me that I had seen the old man rise up; and as accident or luck would have it, my hand pressed upon some spring, and the stone started up from its setting——'

'Which stone? where is the spring?' demanded Zitzka, speaking with feverish impatience,

'Here,—press this stone forcibly down in that particular corner,' said the Taborite, suiting the action to the word; 'and here is the result,' he added, raising the exquisitely-fitting and well-contrived trap-door.

'My good friend,' exclaimed Zitzka, exchanging a look of joyous satisfaction

with his daughter, 'you have rendered us a great service, and you shall not lack a suitable reward. Now leave the trap-door open, keep watch over it, and if *we* do not return in half an hour, then may you argue that some peril has befallen us. In this case, you will alarm the guard and order the soldiers thereof to plunge unhesitatingly down into the subterraneans to which this trap-door leads.'

'Your orders, general, shall be faithfully executed,' said the Taborite sentinel.

''Tis well,' observed Zitzka. 'And now,' he added, turning towards the forest-maiden, 'let us proceed, Angela, upon the solemn and important business which we have in hand.

Thus speaking, the Captain-General began the descent of the stone-steps, carrying the pine-torch in his hand. His daughter followed close behind him, and in this manner did they enter the descending and ascending passages leading under the moat and debouching into the vast subterranean place of tombs. The door opening into this cemetery was fortunately unlocked; otherwise its massiveness would have proved a formidable, if not insuperable barrier, to the farther progress of the Captain-General and his newly-found daughter.

The torch flung a lurid glare upon the dark marble monuments and brought out the white ones into ghastly relief; the air struck with a sepulchral chill to the very marrow of the bones, and the gloomy vaults gave back the echoes of the footsteps, as the father and daughter pursued their way. But what could daunt the intrepid Zitzka? or how could Angela experience alarm when protected by the most redoubtable warrior of the age, and that hero her own sire?

Nevertheless, the whole person of Zitzka quivered from head to foot, and the graceful form of the forest maiden was likewise influenced by a nervous trembling. And yet it was not fear that either felt. But the hardy Taborite was about to meet one whom he had long deemed dead, and the thought of encountering whom had already excited many varied feelings in his breast, and called up many touching associations in his memory; while Angela was swayed by those emotions which had naturally followed a certain revelation which her father had made to her touching the White Lady.

But we will not pause to analyze the feelings of the father and daughter as they pursued their way through the place of tombs; what the nature of those feelings must have been, the reader will presently understand full well.

And here must we leave them for a few moments in order to relate an incident which occurred in the little chapel where the sentinel had remained mounting guard over the trap-door which was left open.

The Captain General, be it remembered, had taken the pine torch in his hand; and the Taborite soldier was left in the semi-obscurity of the chapel. But this place was only partially involved in gloom, forasmuch as the silver planet of the night had by this time risen and was pouring its effulgence, cold and colorless like a slanting column of transparent ice, into the diminutive building. And it was while the sentinel was marvelling within his own mind what object the Captain General and his fair companion could possibly have in visiting the unknown subterraneans to which the open trap-door led,—it was while he was thus meditating, we say, that the stream of argentine lustre flooding in at the entrance of the chapel was suddenly darkened by the appearance of a female form upon the threshold.

'Who comes?' demanded the sentinel, and his quick eye perceived at a glance that the figure was tall and graceful, though enveloped in a long dark cloak; while the black veil thrown over her head revealed in its undulating folds the taper length and undulating arching of the neck, the splendid slope of the shoulders, and the statuesque carriage of the bust.

'Who comes?' echoed the lady, in a voice so musical in its metallic intonation that it produced upon the soldier the same effect as a halo may be supposed to excite when significant of the presence of an angelic being. 'You asked me who comes,' she continued, 'and I may assure you in all confidence that I am a friend.'

'Surely—oh! surely I should know that voice?' exclaimed the Taborite, his own voice trembling with joy and suspense.

'Yes, you may doubtless recognize the voice, as you are sure to remember this countenance,' said the lady, at the same time throwing back the dark veil, and turning her face in such a manner that the flood of moonlight streamed full upon her features.

'Oh! I am glad you have come back

to us,' exclaimed the Taborite, in a tone indicative of unfeigned joy. 'There have been sad and terrible rumors concerning you, lady; but the soldiers of Mount Tabor would rather make allowances for you than harm a hair of your head.'

'No—no,' cried the lady, with exceeding bitterness; 'they do not all entertain so kindly a feeling towards me. But it is enough that you are thus generous,' she hastened to add. 'And now tell me in which direction the Captain General went ere now, with the female who was accompanying him. I traced him hither, indeed I saw them enter the little chapel—but I did not observe when they sallied forth again.'

'Nor have they gone forth, lady,' said the Taborite sentinel; and, as he spoke, he glanced down at the trap-door, which remained open.

'What means that aperture? and what signify your words and looks?' demanded the lady, starting in sudden surprise; then, as an idea seemed to strike her, she said, 'Is it possible that this trap-door leads down into passages communicating with the subterraneans that report represents as existing beneath Altendorf Castle?'

'Doubtless it is so, lady,' observed the Taborite soldier; 'for the Captain General and the young woman who accompanied him, have gone down into the regions to which the trap-door leads.'

'Then I will follow them!' was the abrupt exclamation which burst from the lips of the lady, as she hurriedly replaced the black veil over her countenance, and at the same time advanced from the threshold to the edge of the aperture formed by the open trap-door.

'You will follow them!' echoed the sentinel in amazement. 'But I dare not permit you to pass, lady.'

'You dare not?' she cried, in a tone of mingled remonstrance and defiance. 'Such language falls not agreeable upon my ears——'

'Pardon me, lady,' interrupted the sentinel; 'but how am I to act? Does the captain-general know that you are following him thus stealthily and watching his movements thus strangely?

'Enough of this questioning!' exclaimed the lady. 'You ere now spoke in a kind tone towards me——'

'And heaven forbid that I should ever address you in other terms!' 'Have, then, your own way, lady, but I beseech you to hold me harmless!'

'Fear nothing on your own account, my good friend,' said the lady; and with these words she hastily descended the stone steps leading into the subterraneans.

CHAPTER XCV.

A CROWD OF INCIDENTS.

In the meantime John Zitzka and Angela were pursuing their way through the vast cemetery; and in a few minutes they reached the tomb of black marble which was dedicated to the memory of the Baroness Ermenonda of Altendorf. The forest-maiden paused to direct her father's attention to that monument; and captain-general, after surveying the sculptured marble, and reading the brazen epitaph with a profound attention, exclaimed in a tone of mingled sorrow and bitterness, 'Oh! the hideous mockery of that splendid tomb!—Oh! the foul hypocrisy of that mellifluous inscription!'

Having thus spoken, the captain-general of the Taborites turned abruptly away from the monument and hurried onward, with Angela by his side. The glare of the pine torch which he carried in his hand now fell on a coffin that stood upon the pavement floor, between two marble tombs; and Angela started back in sudden dismay as she beheld that ominous object. But Zitzka, who was too familiar with scenes of warfare to shudder at death in any shape or its emblems in any guise, instantaneously approached the spot where the coffin lay; and stooping down, he opened the lid,

Angela averted her eyes in order not to behold the corpse which she naturally supposed the coffin to contain; but the ejaculation of amazement which burst from the lips of Zitzka, recalled her attention in that direction; and, with an equal surprise, did she perceive that the winding-sheet, instead of wrapping the stark form of the dead, had just been lifted from the galaxy formed by costly gems, massive pieces of plate, gold coins, and jewels of incalculable worth.

'Ah! this was the treasure bequeathed by the late King Wenzel to his daughter, who is likewise no more,' observed Zitzka. 'But what can have become of that Baroness Hamelen who so officiously volunteered to deliver alike treasure and princess into my hands?'

And as he asked himself this question in a low, musing tone, he replaced the winding-sheet and closed the lid of the coffin: then, still guided by Angela, he pursued his way, and in a few moments they entered the chamber of the machinery.

'Oh! is it not horrible—horrible?' murmured the forest-maiden, a cold shudder passing over her entire frame as she clung to her father's arm for support. 'Its dreadful use almost suggests itself to the imagination; and yet the fancy shrinks appalled——'

'Yes—'tis the work of fiends in human shape, Angela,' interrupted John Zitzka, his own stalwart form trembling for a moment, and his own iron nerves quivering with a spasmodic sensation that passed with the speed of lightning along them, as his eye embraced at a glance all the hideous features of the detestable mechanism.

'Did I not tell you, father,' said Angela, in a soft and tremulous tone, 'that you must prepare yourself to encounter the gloom of that place of monuments—the terror of this ghastly machinery, and the awful solemnity of the Bronze Statue, in our search amidst these subterraneans for that beloved being whom we are now both alike so anxious to fold in our arms? Did I not warn you, beloved sire, that the mysteries and the horrors of Altendorf Castle transcended all powers of description?'

'You did, Angela—you did,' returned Zitzka. 'But by the eternal God who reigns above us! I will destroy every vestige of this accursed stronghold——'

'Tranquillise yourself, dear father,' said the forest-maiden, looking earnestly and appealingly up into the grim warrior's countenance. 'Remember that our object, at least for the present, is a peaceful and a holy one——'

'True, beloved Angela!' ejaculated Zitzka. 'Come, let us leave this detestable place, let us pursue our way,'—then, as he accompanied his daughter from the chamber of the machinery, he muttered to himself, 'No wonder—my God! no wonder, that the fated Gloria should have existed in such mortal horror of the barest allusion to the Bronze Statue!'

'Heaven grant that we may fall in speedily with her whom we seek!' observed Angela, as she showed Zitzka the way up the stone steps into the room where the various implements and materials used in sustaining the polish of the colossal statue were kept.

'Perhaps she is no longer an inmate of these subterraneans?' said the Taborite chieftain, with a profound sigh. 'Or perhaps——But I dare not give utterance to so terrible an idea——'

'O heavens!' exclaimed Angela, too well divining the nature of the thought that was uppermost in her father's imagination, 'let us hope that Famine has at least spared *her!*'——and she shuddered from head to foot as she thus gave expression to the horrible thought. 'But if she be still alive,' continued the forest-maiden, with that rapidity of tone which is frequently caught up by persons anxious to escape from one topic into another, 'if she be still alive, rest assured that we shall find her within these gloomy regions.'

'God grant that it may be so!' exclaimed Zitzka, solemnly.

The father and daughter now entered the hall of the Bronze Statue; and as the colossal image stood out, like a being invested with a subdued halo of glory, from amidst the obscurity, as the light of the torch which Zitzka carried was borne nearer and nearer towards it, the soul of even that mighty warrior was troubled, although he knew not the precise nature of the hideous use to which the accursed effigy was appropriated. Still he had heard *before*, and *now* comprehended from actual observation, enough to make him aware that the statue, although so placid and mild in outward semblance, was really and truly an engine of some diabolical torture and hideous death—that while it looked like the effigy of a dweller in heaven, it was actually the representative of the most damnable fiend of hell, so that if it were a saint in seeming, it was a demoness in sooth!

'Let us hasten away, dear father,' murmured Angela, clinging to the arm of her parent as he stood to contemplate the image; 'that statue inspires me with a horror which chills all the blood in my veins and strikes with an icy sensation to my very heart's core.'

'Come, then, dearest child,' said Zitzka, 'and let us prosecute our search in these labyrinthine subterraneans of mystery and horror.'

The Taborite chieftain and his daughter now entered the circular chamber; but scarcely had they paused a moment there to enable Zitzka to contemplate the ominous stone hassock and the crucifix, when the creaking sounds of massive hinges fell upon their ears. Their looks were simultaneously thrown into

the adjoining passage, whence the noise appeared to emanate; and they beheld a huge door slowly moving on those grating hinges, as if it were a portion of the mighty wall itself that was thus opening.

Neither Zitzka nor Angela had time to exchange a glance, much less a whispered word, with each other, for a man, holding a lamp in his hand, emerged from the place with which the huge door communicated. But when the glare of the pine-torch, so superior to the comparatively feeble glimmering of his own lamp, burst upon his vision, at the same time that he caught sight of two persons in the circular chamber, he gave vent to an ejaculation of mingled terror and amazement and was about to retire that instant.

'Hubert! Hubert! we are friends—not foes!' suddenly exclaimed Angela, who recognised the countenance the moment it appeared in the opening of the door; and she bounded forward to detain the old steward.

'Ah! is it possible?' he cried, instantaneously struck by the voice, and remembering it as well as if it had never ceased to sound with its silver harmony in his ears; then coming forward, he exclaimed, 'Good heavens! Aegela, what dost thou here? and who is thy companion?'

'My father, the great chieftain of the Taborites, Hubert, my own loved and loving father!' cried the maiden, turning back towards Zitzka and taking his hand affectionately.

'Oh! then you now know everything, Angela?' said Hubert, his voice trembling with varied emotions, 'and you have doubtless delivered to the Captain General of the Taborites that ring which was indeed intended to make you known to him in case of need? But, alas,—alas! why didst thou not come sooner? Oh! why not,—why not?'

And the old steward shaded his face with his hand to veil the tears that burst from his eyes and trickled down his cheeks.

'Good heavens! what mean you?' exclaimed Angela, now struck with a presentiment that something dreadful had occurred.

'Speak, old man, speak!' said the Captain-General of the Taborites, simultaneously seized with the sudden alarm that the hope which had brought him thither was doomed to be defeated after all.

'Oh! that I should have such tidings in store for you both!' murmured Hubert, in a broken voice and with his entire frame convulsed by mental agony.

'And those tidings?' asked the forest-maiden, quitting her hold on her father's hand and now clinging to the old steward's arm. 'Tell me—tell me, I implore you—keep me not in suspense—has anything happened to my mother? for I now know that she is my mother!'

'Angela, prepare yourself for the worst,' said Zitzka, in a tone scarcely audible on account of its tremulousness. 'You perceive that this good old man is unable to answer your questions—that he is well nigh suffocated by his grief, and that his tears are flowing thick and fast; and we may thence draw the fatal truth which his lips dare not utter! Tell me, friend, is it not so?' inquired the Captain-General, addressing himself to the old steward.

'Alas! yes, mighty chief, you have augured but too accurately!' responded Hubert. 'That estimable lady whom you both seek is no more!'

'No more!' echoed Zitzka, his heart completely sinking within him now that there was no longer a hope.

'No more!' likewise repeated Angela; and, with a frantic outburst of grief, she fell upon her knees.

The Captain-General of the Taborites hastened to raise his almost distracted daughter; and at the same time several persons issued from the large apartment with which the massive door communicated, and where the lamentations of the forest-maiden had reached their ears. Men clothed in long black gowns, and women clad in the white robes of Carmelite nuns, now thronged upon the threshold and gathered round the group formed by the old steward, the Taborite warrior, and the unhappy Angela; but, at the earnest instance of Hubert, all these members of the Brotherhood retreated into the spacious room, whither Zitzka likewise conducted Angela.

The old steward closed the door, and the Captain-General besought his daughter to tranquillise herself. The maiden exerted all her moral power to that effect; but, with the tears still streaming down her cheeks—her white hands clasped in earnest entreaty, and her bosom heaving with the convulsive sobs that agitated her heart almost to bursting, she besought the old steward to respond to the numerous questions which she put to him. And these que-

ries were expressed with all the haste of an agonising suspense and feverish excitement; for the affectionate Angela sought to learn how long the White Lady had been dead—whether she had perished by famine—if she had died happily—where she was buried—and any other particulars which Hubert might have to communicate.

'Though sorely pressed for food as all the inmates of this castle have lately been,' said the old steward, 'our revered mistress fell not a victim to the cruel tortures of famine. 'Twas a sudden breaking down of a constitution undermined by long years of sorrow; and the catastrophe was hastened by a shock which her ladyship experienced some six weeks ago, when accident made her a spectatrix of the hideous deaths of the Marquis of Schomberg and the Baroness Hamelen, who received the Virgin's Kiss!'

'Ah! the baroness perished thus?' exclaimed Zitzka; but, his attention instantly concentrating itself again in the *one* absorbing topic of mournful interest, he said, 'Proceed, thou good old man, and hasten to relieve my poor Angela from suspense.'

'Three days only have elapsed since her ladyship breathed her last,' continued Herbert; 'and her remains have not yet been consigned to the tomb. Indeed, the awful state of misery, suffering, and uncertainty to which the siege has reduced all the inmates of this castle—whether in these subterraneans or in the regions above—has delayed all the preparations which we proposed to make for the due celebration of the deceased lady's obsequies. And yet, as you may perceive, there is no lack of mourners,' added Hubert, looking slowly around upon the assembled male and female members of the Brotherhood.

And those persons were gazing with mingled awe and wonder upon Zitzka; for Lionel and Konrad, who were among the number, had instantaneously recognised the Captain-General of the Taborites, and had circulated in a hasty whisper the fact of his presence.

'Yes, there are indeed many mourners,' observed Zitzka; 'if all those whom I now behold around me have prayers to breathe and tears to drop over the deceased lady's tomb.'

'Oh! and never will mourners' grief have been more sincere,' exclaimed Hubert; for every one of those persons, male and female, has been saved from the doom of the Bronze Statue by the lady whose remains now lie in yonder chamber.'

'And also by *your* generous connivance in the good deed, worthy old man,' said one of the brothers Schwartz, throwing a look of fervent gratitude upon Hubert.

'You said that the remains of the departed one repose in yonder chamber,' murmured Angela, taking the venerable steward's hand and fixing upon him her tearful eyes.

'Yes, dear young lady, and thou shalt contemplate those marble features for the last time,' said Hubert, understanding the look of entreaty which Angela had thus fastened upon him.

As he gave utterance to these words, he led the way towards the chamber which he had already indicated. Angela and the Captain-General of the Taborites accompanied him thither, and the brethren and sisters of the community dwelling in that place, followed close behind.

Slowly and solemnly did Hubert open the door of the chamber, and upon a couch standing at the farther extremity of that room, lay the corpse of the White Lady.

She was clothed in the Carmelite vesture which she was wont to wear in her lifetime; her hands were crossed over her bosom, her countenance still wore the expression of holy resignation which had animated it at the instant of dissolution. The heart's last earthly feeling remained stamped upon the mortal lineaments at the moment death was changing there into marble; and as the soul took wing to the far off realms of empyrean bliss, it had left behind upon the features which were once its index the reflection of that pious sentiment of resignation which had fitted it to enter into paradise!

Over the couch stooped Angela—and as she kissed the brow of the deceased parent, thick and fast fell her tears upon the marble countenance of the dead:—then over the couch also leant the Captain-General of the Taborites—and within the steel corslet the stalwart breast of the hero was agitated with profound emotions as he gazed upon those features which he had last seen long years back, so transcendent in all the loveliness of their blushing vitality, and which he had never thought to behold again, either living or dead.

Then the great chieftain of the Taborites and the forest-maiden knelt down by the side of the couch;—and Hubert,

stretching out his arms like a prophet towards the men in the long black gowns and the females in the pure white robes, exclaimed in a measured and solemn voice, 'On your knees, brethren—on your knees, sisters—and pray for the repose of the soul of Ermenonda, Baroness of Altendorf!'

And now those who obeyed the injunction thus put forth by the venerable Hubert, learnt for the first time that she who had been so long the tutelary genius of the place, was none other than the wife of the Lord of Altendorf,—that very lady whom the world supposed to have died twenty years back, and to whose memory the sable monument was built and the brazen inscription dedicated!

For upwards of a quarter of an hour did the entire party kneel in prayer,—Zitzka and his daughter on either side of the couch—Hubert at the foot—and the members of the Brotherhood along that extremity of the chamber whence the door opened into the other apartment. The solemn ceremony being completed, and that tribute of respect having been shown to the remains of the departed lady, they all retired from the chamber of death; and the door of that room being closed, the Captain-General proceeded to explain the course which he now thought fit to be adopted.

'The remains of the deceased Baroness shall be interred this very night,' he said; 'and the tomb raised to her memory shall be rendered in reality available for the purpose which a hideous mockery alone has hitherto assigned to it. I will forthwith return to my encampment; and in the shortest possible space will I come back, followed by servitors bearing provisions for your immediate relief, and likewise by masons to open the black marble monument and seal it up again when the obsequies shall have been performed. Angela, thou wilt remain here, my child; and the good Hubert will give thee any further explanation which thou mayst require touching the last moments of her whom we came too late to embrace alive! In half-an-hour I shall be here again: the funeral will then take place—and afterwards we will restore to freedom those whose captivity here is no longer difficult to understand.'

The look which the Taborite chieftain threw around him, read the deepest gratitude mingled with the liveliest hope upon every countenance. Then some grew faint with excess of joy at the prospect of release from that living tomb: others fell upon their knees and began to pray fervently; —some burst into tears—others into hysterics;—many threw themselves into each other's arms—and a few danced as if insane, forgetful of the corpse of their benefactress in the adjoining room. In a word, that apartment which for years and years had appeared so sombre and proved the scene of so much life-tiring monotony, suddenly seemed to have changed its aspect—to have received an infusion of better and purer air—and to be lighted up with a more cheering lustre!

But of all those into whose hearts the Taborite chieftain's promise of speedy liberation poured the wildest and most thrilling joy, none experienced such an intense enthusiasm of commingling gratitude and bliss as Sir Ernest de Colmar's youthful pages, Lionel and Konrad.

Meantime Zitzka had sallied forth alone from the apartment of the Brotherhood. Angela remained behind to await his return, in obedience to his recommendation; and he refused the offer volunteered by several of the members to guide him through the subterraneans. Confident of being enabled to find his way, and anxious to be left for a short space to the sole company of that train of reflections which the incidents of the last few hours had developed, the Captain-General took a lamp in his hand and issued from the apartment, the door of which was carefully closed and secured by those whom he left behind.

Traversing the circular chamber, Zitzka entered the spacious hall in which the Bronze Statue stood; and curiosity prompted him to advance close up to the collossal image in order to contemplate it at his leisure for a few moments. But scarcely had he began to study its details with some degree of attention, when the hurried sounds of many footsteps approaching through the echoing passage reached his ears. He looked back—the circular chamber was already crowded with a number of armed men who were pushing rapidly forward; and two or three of whom carried lamps in their hands. At the same instant they caught the glimpse of *his* countenance by the light which he was in the act of holding high up at the time;—and in a moment his name burst from the lips of the famine strick-

en beings who recognised him instantaneously.

Ferociously did they rush furward to wreak their vengeance upon the man who was alike the author of all their sufferings and all their humiliation,—the man who had reduced them to the extremest verge of famine and conquered them in the fight,—the man, too, into whose hands the Castle would have been surrendered on the morrow!

'What! Zitzka here?—is it possible?" exclaimed Father Cyprian, who was amongst the band of armed men—or rather its leader.

The fact was that the priest, dreading the alternative of falling into the hands of the Captain-General, had induced some forty or fifty of the starving soldiers of the garrison to accompany him in the desperate scheme of cutting their way through the Taborite lines, under cover of the obsurity of night: and in order to do this, the priest was leading his "forlorn hope" through the subterraneans, so that they might emerge thence by the avenue of the trap-door in the little chapel. The whole of this band, be it observed, consisted of sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue: and it formed a part of their present scheme to destroy not only that image, but likewise the infernal mechanism underneath, so that not a trace should remain to afford the uninitiated a clue to the horrors or the mysteries of Altendorf Castle on its falling into the hands of the Taborites.

Return we, after this brief digression, to the thread of our narrative.

On observing the armed men rushing onward and on perceiviug that he was recognised, Zitzka flung down the lamp and grasped the handle of his sword. But the sudden efforts thus made gave to his body an impulse which caused his feet to slip upon the slimy pavement;—and unable to recover his balance, he fell heavily before he had even drawn the weapon from its sheath.

The next moment he was a prisoner in the hands of the wretches whose eyes, rendered ferocious by hunger, glared with wolfish rage upon the Captain-General of the Taborites; and already were a dozen swords uplifted to despatch him, when Father Cyprian exclaimed, 'Slaughter him not thus, my friends: but let our worst enemy at least serve as a last sacrifice to the Bronze Statue!'

And the horrible yell of acclaim which greeted this suggestion, rang through the spacious hall and along the vaulted passages leading thence in every direction.

'Quick! let the work be done without delay!' cried the vindictive priest, whose thirst for blood was actually sharpened by the haughty look of defiance which John Zitzka threw alike upon him and on the engine of death. 'Here! two of you must act as Executioners, my brave fellows: let another approach with a light—and then shall the usurper enjoy the elysian raptures of the Virgin's Kiss!'

As Father Cyprian uttered these last words, he flung a look of diabolical hatred upon the Captain-General: then, hastening up to the image, he showed a couple of his armed bravos the secret spring whereby the mechanism of the statue itself was set in motion. Then the arms of the colossal image unfolded slowly—and all the front part opened in the manner which has been described in a previous chapter.

'Let me assure myself that the knives are sharp and the spikes well pointed,' exclaimed the priest, who in the fiendish malignity of his hatred against the Taborite chieftain, sought to enhance the bitterness of impending death by detailing all the horrors of the tortures that were to precede it. 'Thou hast only one eye, Zitzka: but that will soon be darkened also!'

And the diabolical chuckle which the Carthusian gave as he uttered these words, were accompanied by the mocking laughter of the wretches whose iron grasp was fixed upon the Taborite chieftain, and whose eyes were glowing hyena-like upon the countenance which maintained an expression of dignified composure mingled with haughty defiance.

Then, as if to assure himself that all the horrible apparatus connected with the engine of death was indeed complete,—but in reality to prolong for a few minutes the exquisite tortures which he hoped were endured by the Captain-General, despite the heroism of his demeanour,—Father Cyprian stooped down and looked into the body of the statue.

But at that instant,—swift as the eagle from its eyre sweeps down upon its prey,—or as a hound, loosened from its lash, darts in pursuit of the timid deer,—did a female rush from the door-way leading to the workshop. Away flew the cloak which had wrapped her form—away flew the veil which had covered

her head: both did her fair white hands loosen and let go in a moment—and, with the rich masses of shining hair floating over her alabaster shoulders, it was the brilliant Gloria Ildegardo who thus burst upon the view of her uncle the Captain-General, and the band of armed bravos.

But before even the ejaculation of surprise which fell from many a lip had ceased to vibrate in the air,—with a rapidity as wondrous and as fated as the lightning-flash that darts down from the cloud and strikes the forest-tree,—did Gloria spring towards the Bronze Statue. At that moment the Carthusian priest was in the act of withdrawing his head from the contemplation of the interior of the colossal image; but even as his upturning countenance enabled him to catch a glimpse of Gloria's flushed and infuriate features, with her large black eyes shining like portentous meteors,—even at that very same instant, we say, did she hurl him forward, with a strength that was irresistible.

It was all the work of a moment! Into the interior of the Bronze Statue was the wretched Carthusian precipitated;—the two bravos standing near, fell back in horror and dismay—and the arms of the colossal image folding again, the doors closed at the same time upon Father Cyprian, the beginning of whose mortal agonies was already announced by the deafening yells which, borrowing a metallic sound from the image whence they came so piercingly, vibrated through the hall.

The paralysis of consternation seized upon all save Gloria herself; and she, turning towards the assemblage, extended her snow-white arm with the air of a Pythoness, exclaiming, '*Thus perishes the vile hypocrite who despoiled me of my virtue!*'

Scarcely were these words uttered, when there was a rush of many heavy footsteps in the passage communicating with the workshop; and the chamber of the Bronze Statue was instantaneously inundated with a host of Taborite soldiers.

For the sentinel in the little chapel, finding that the half hour was passed, and that Zitzka did not return, had obeyed the instructions given to him, and had sent the force which now arrived so timeously.

Then, while the Carthusian priest was meeting that death which, horrible though it were, was but the doom of a just retribution after all, the armed servitors of the Bronze Statue were overpowered by the Taborite soldiers, Zitzka was delivered from the peril wherein he had been temporarily placed—and Gloria was protected from those who might have been inclined to wreak a bloody vengeance upon her for the Carthusian's death.

And in the mean time the accursed mechanism had done its diabolical work: pierced by a thousand wounds, blinded, and bleeding all over, the miserable wretch had gone through the trap door, down upon the mighty cylinders bristling with the ghastly blades; and then round, and round, and round had revolved those tremendous wheels—hacking, hewing, and mincing the victim to pieces until the streamlet beneath bore away the last traces of the appalling tragedy.

CHAPTER XCVI.

RETRIBUTION.

WITHIN an hour from the occurrence of the startling scene just related, manifold were the changes which had taken place within the walls of Altendorf Castle.

The banner of the insurgent aristocracy was lowered from the tall staff on the huge central tower; and the standard of the Taborites waved in the moonlight in its stead. Vast quantities of provisions had been fetched from the encampment of the brave and victorious Reformers; and the famine-stricken inmates of the strong hold had recruited their strength with a copious meal. A Taborite garrison was already established in the castle, the late defenders of which were now held as captives.—The nobles who had headed the insurrection against Zitzka's government were all collected in one large apartment, sentinels being placed at the doors: the wives, daughters, and other female relatives of these rebel-peers were gathered in an adjoining chamber, which was likewise guarded.

The members of the Brotherhood, male and female, had quitted the subterranean rooms which they had so recently occupied, and where many of them had dwelt for years and years; and they were now all congregated in the handsomest saloon in the castle.

Gloria—the beauteous Gloria, was a prisoner in a chamber to which she had

been ordered to retire by her uncle the Captain-General: but she was happy—thrillingly, deliciously happy, in the thought of the terrible vengeance which she had that night wreaked upon the Carthusian ecclesiastic.

In another room of that vast stronghold were now assembled the Captain-General of the Taborites, his daughter Angela, and Hubert the steward. A courier had been already sent off to the Count of Rosenberg, with despatches hastily penned by Zitzka's own hand: a messenger was likewise on his way to the forest cottage occupied by the Wildons; and a third emissary had been despatched to Ildegardo Castle.

All these arrangements had been made and these various measures adopted within the hour that succeeded the terrific tragedy which had given another and a *last* victim to the Bronze Statue; and now, as above stated, the mighty Zitzka, his daughter, and the old steward, were seated together, awaiting the arrival of the Baron of Altendorf, a guard having been sent to fetch that nobleman from the encampment where he and his son Rodolph were detained prisoners.

In a short time the baron was introduced into the apartment. He was already aware that the Taborites were in possession of his castle; and a rumor had reached him to the effect that an entrance had been obtained by means of the subterranean passages. He therefore knew that the Bronze Statue and its hideous machinery must have been discovered; and he naturally dreaded lest he himself should become a victim to the tremendous engine of torture and death to which he had doomed so many in his time. But he was no coward; and as it was with a firm step that he had accompanied the guard to the room whither he was thus conducted, so was it with a determined air and a haughty demeanor that he entered into the presence of the Captain-General.

But the moment his looks fell upon Angela, he recognised the maiden who had delivered him from the Castle of Prague, and who, as he had heard from the Carthusian, was the object of his son's affections. That she should be in his fortress at all, was a circumstance alone calculated to excite his wonder; but that she should be thus familiarly seated by the side of the Captain-General was an additional source of amazement and perplexity. Nor less was he astonished at beholding his steward likewise forming one of the conclave of three into whose presence he was ushered.

Waving his hand for the guard to retire, Zitzka motioned the Baron of Altendorf to take a seat at the table; and now the four were alone together in that apartment. The nobleman took the chair to which the Captain-General pointed; then he looked earnestly at the steward, and then to Angela, as if to read in their countenances the meaning of this formal proceeding and the doom that awaited himself. But Hubert studiously avoided meeting the eyes of that master whom he had served so long, yet whom he abhorred with the deepest loathing; while Angela, profoundly affected by the many and varied incidents which had occurred on this memorable night, was gazing upon her sire with a look that pleaded for the fallen nobleman.

'Baron of Altendorf,' said Zitzka, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a tone that was impressive and awe-inspiring; 'I will at once relieve you from all suspense in regard to your own personal safety. Great as your crimes have been, I will not harm a hair of your head—no, not a single hair of your head; although, at the same time, I must warn you frankly and candidly that the future treatment to which you are to be subjected, will be such as shall render you powerless to work mischief for the remainder of your days. Perpetual imprisonment, but with such indulgences as are compatible with your habits and the social position you have occupied—this is the sentence that I pass upon you.'

'The life, then, that you grant, proud conqueror, is scarcely worth thanking you for,' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf, in a tone of sullen defiance.

'Wrap not yourself up too hastily in the gloom of an evil disposition and an ungrateful soul,' said Zitzka, his voice conveying a remonstrance more solemn than even his words: 'for it may prove that I have certain revelations to make which shall yet touch some relic of good feeling that is latent in your breast. For I cannot believe that any man, despite of all the evil influences under which he may have been placed, will have tutored himself to crush every sentiment of humanity—every emotion of love and tenderness—in his bosom.'

'To what sermon is this fine thesis to lead?' demanded the Baron of Altendorf, adopting a tone of arrogance in

order to conceal the interest and suspense which he now in reality experienced.

'I will not waste words in an unnecessary preface,' continued the Captain-General of the Taborites. 'Know, then, that the lady whose death thou didst proclaim to the world twenty long years ago——'

'Ah! my wife!' exclaimed the baron, with a sudden start like the paroxysm attendant upon a pang of mortal agony. 'What! hast thou betrayed *that* secret, villain?' he cried, turning towards the venerable steward.

'The worthy Hubert betrayed nothing until accident, or rather Providence, led me on to such discoveries that denial or misrepresentation became impossible as well as useless,' observed Zitzka, his tone gathering even a deeper solemnity as he proceeded. 'But you will do well, Baron of Altendorf, not to interrupt me with passionate accusations thrown in the teeth of this good old man. For thou standest upon the threshold of a startling revelation; and all thy feelings and sentiments will be absorbed in amazement, when I declare to thee that the wife whose death thou didst proclaim twenty years ago, and to whom thou didst raise a monument—that this wife of thine, I say, remained alive and breathed the air of this world until three days ago!'

The announcement thus made fell with a stunning effect upon the brain of Altendorf. For nearly a minute did he sit gazing in stolid wonderment and in the vacancy of stupefaction upon the Captain-General of the Taborites. But at last, as a sudden light flashed in upon his soul, he sprang from his seat, exclaiming, 'I understand it all! Yes—it must be so—and you have spoken truly, Zitzka. Hubert, you deceived me—you saved her—you allowed her to live! And that apparition at the altar, on the day which was to have given Bohemia's crown to my son—oh! yes—it was she—it was Ermenonda!'

And quivering all over with a terrific excitement, as if seized by a palsy, the Baron of Altendorf sank back into the seat whence he had so wildly sprung up.

'And now listen attentively, and compose yourself if you can,' resumed Zitzka: 'for in justice to the memory of the deceased Baroness of Altendorf, I have an averment to proclaim, and upon the truth of which I stake my soul's salvation.'

'Oh! again does a light flash in upon my imagination!' exclaimed the nobleman; 'and I at once comprehend another phase in the history of the past! *You*, General Zitzka—*you* were the lover of my wife!'

'Yes, I was indeed the one on whom she bestowed her affections, and who adored her so madly. Oh! God alone knows how fervidly, how devotedly in return!' said the Taborite chief, his voice expressing feelings profoundly stirred. 'But however culpable Ermanonda may have been, *before* her marriage with you, Baron of Altendorf, I swear—solemnly swear, as a man fearing God and believing that I possess a soul to be saved—I swear, I say, that never, never did she prove faithless to the vows which she pledged to thee at the altar, wrung from her by a stern compulsion and a dire tyranny although those pledges were!'

'Oh! was she indeed innocent—indeed innocent!' murmured the Baron of Altendorf, trembling all over. 'And did I doom to a horrible death the mother of my loved Rudolph—my only son? But God be thanked that she escaped that death—that she lived on, despite my cruel decree——'

'Yes—lived on, thanks to this good old man!' exclaimed Zitzka, turning toward Hubert, adown whose pale and careworn cheeks the tears were falling thick and fast. 'But there is much to be explained, Baron of Altendorf—much that it behoves you to learn. These explanations cannot be afforded now: in the morning they shall be given fully. I myself have only as yet received a rapid outline of one part of the history from Hubert's lips: but he will enter into minuter details at a more fitting opportunity, when also the other portion of the narrative of the past shall be supplied by myself. In the mean time we have a solemn and sacred duty to perform—a duty to which I hope you will address yourself with the feelings of an altered man. I mean the celebration of the funeral obsequies of the Baroness of Altendorf.'

'That she had loved more fondly than wisely ere our marriage, I was well aware,' said the Baron, in a deep and somewhat tremulous tone: 'and all *that* was forgiven before I led her to the altar—if forgiveness under such circumstances I had a right to bestow. That she was afterwards faithless to me, I did believe, and have believed through twenty long, long years, until now!—

But that I was misled by circumstances, that I was blinded by jealousy, that I was too hasty to condemn without a fair investigation, I now admit to have been probable, certainly possible: and I will take your word, General Zitzka, to that effect. Therefore, under this altered aspect of past events, and as the only atonement which I can now offer to the departed spirit of the wronged and injured Ermanonda—I will follow her remains to the tomb.'

Well pleased am I, Baron of Altendorf,' said Zitzka, 'to behold this change of demeanor and feeling on your part. A short interval yet remains until the obsequies can be celebrated: forasmuch as I have despatched a courier to request the immediate attendance of Lord Rosenherg, the brother of the deceased Baroness. It will be but consistent and courteous to await his coming; and in the meantime I will make to your ears a communication respecting the maiden whom you behold at my right hand.'

As the Captain-General uttered these words, he looked fondly upon Angela, down whose cheeks were flowing the pearly tears that all the preceding conversation relative to her mother had called forth.

'This heroic maiden,' resumed Zitzka, 'who delivered you, Baron of Altendorf, from the Castle of Prague, is my own daughter, the child of the departed Ermenonda!'

'O God! and Rodolph loved her, and he would have made her his wife!' exclaimed the Baron. 'But thank heaven! that crowning iniquity was never accomplished! And, Oh! what will Rodolph's feelings be when he learns that his mother has lived until the present time, lived in a sepulchral gloom, isolated from the world, and rescued by the mercy of Hubert from the awful death to which I had doomed her?—When he learns all this, he will execrate his father, and my son's curse is something more than I could possibly bear! But if I explain to him everything——'

'Yes, this course must be adopted,' said Zitzka: 'for there are already so many who are now acquainted with the fact that the Baroness of Altendorf dragged on a wretched existence in the subterraneans of this Castle, until three days ago, there are so many persons I say, now acquainted with this fact, that it would be impossible to prevent it from reaching his ears sooner or later.'

'And yet, and yet,' observed the Baron of Altendorf, his entire frame now trembling with emotion, 'I would sooner die than confess to my son that for five-and-twenty years I have been the Chief of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue. As yet he knows nothing of all the tremendous mysteries belonging thereto: he is even unaware of the existence of those very subterraneans where the image stands and where the mechanism is erected. The chieftainship of that tribunal was an accursed legacy which I derived from my father; and although I have fulfilled the horrible duties of my office with the zeal and the readiness of a man who suffers himself to be whirled on by a torrent which sustains him buoyantly on its bosom so longs as he yields to its power, but which would swallow him up in a moment were he to offer the slightest resistance to its eddying course, although, I say, I have proved fully obedient to the oath which I took when entering upon the supreme functions of that tribunal, yet heaven knows that I oved not the stupendous mystery enough to be willing to bequeath my power to Rodolph. No, sooner would I have killed him with my own hand than have trained him to inheret that hieftainship. Moreover, a register of the names of all the victims is kept, and in that register would Rodolph have found the name of his own mother—'

'Enough!' exclaimed Zitzka: 'accident has within the last few hours rendered me a spectator to the horrible punishment inflicted by the Bronze Statue.'

'You—a spectator!—cried the Baron, with the profoundest amazement.

'Yes, a spectator, and well nigh a victim,' returned the Captain General. 'That perfidious priest——'

'Oh! Father Cyprian?' exclaimed the Baron. 'What of him?'

'He is no more!' responded Zitzka. 'A terrible vengeance has overtaken him—and Gloria Ildegardo, my injured niece, was heaven's instrument in assigning to him his righteous doom!'

'What new marvels do I hear?' cried the Lord of Altendorf. 'The Carthusian assured me that Gloria Ildegardo died some years ago: and now I learn that she is alive—and that she is your niece——'

'It is impossible for me to divine the motive which could have induced the wretched priest to practise that cheat upon you, Baron of Altendorf,' inter-

rupted Zitzka; 'nor is it worth our while to waste time in conjectures upon the subject.'

'But I can understand the cause full well,' muttered the baron to himself. 'And you say, general, that Gloria Ildegardo is your niece?' exclaimed the nobleman aloud.

'As assuredly as you were her father's persecutor,' replied Zitzka. 'Yes, my sire was Baron Georgey; and the ruins of my ancestral halls are at no great distance from Altendorf Castle.

'This is a night of wondrous revelations,' said the baron. 'But we were ere now discoursing upon a topic profoundly interesting to myself——'

'And we will return to that topic,' interrupted Zitzka, with the curtness that was habitual to him. 'I was observing, when the conversation suddenly diverged into another channel, that having been a spectator of the infernal punishment inflicted by the Bronze Statue, I can full well comprehend the bitter loathing—the intense aversion—the awful repugnance—and the burning shame which you, Baron of Altendorf, must experience in making to your son Rodolph any revelation that will prove you to have been a votary—nay, more—the chieftain of so tremendous a tribunal. Yes, as a father, fearful of being execrated by his own son, you must shrink from the bare idea of allowing him the faintest insight into mysteries so appalling and atrocities so diabolical. But what course can you adopt in order to keep from his ears the real truth respecting those discoveries which have this night been made in Altendorf Castle, and which rumor will shortly spread throughout Bohemia? For when my soldiers burst into the fortalice ere now, they had every opportunity of beholding the statue and the machinery—nay, more—of even gazing upon the latter during its horrible revolutions! Therefore the mysteries and terrors of Altendorf Castle are already known to many; and I have likewise promised that at daybreak the engineers of my army shall uproot the accursed instrument of torture and death, and destroy them as if they had never been. Such proceedings cannot be kept from the ears of your son.'

At this moment an impatient knock at the door resounded through the apartment; and the old steward hastened to answer the summons.

A Taborite soldier rushed, breathless and laboring under a powerful excitement, into the room.

'What has happened?' demanded Zitzka.

'Lord Rodolph, general——the baron's son,' exclaimed the man, in broken sentences, 'has endeavored——'

'What of my boy? what of my beloved Rodolph?' cried the Lord of Altendorf, suddenly seized with the presentiment of some terrible evil.

'He endeavored to escape; he attacked the sentinels who were mounting guard over him,' said the Taborite soldier; 'he slew one, mortally wounded another, and——'

'And what?' demanded the baron, with all the excitement of the most agonising suspense.

'And he was shot by a hackbutteer,' was the answer.

'Shot! You do not mean that he is dead? you would have me understand that he is wounded, and that he has sent for me?' exclaimed the baron, clinging to this last hope as the shipwrecked mariner tenaciously holds to the frailest cord or the slightest spar. 'Speak—speak! Tell me that he is not dead——'

'Alas! I should not tell you truly, my lord,' said the Taborite soldier, in a tone of deep compassion.

'O Rodolph!—my son Rodolph!' cried the baron, with a yell of indescribable anguish, as he staggered forward and fell upon his knees; then, dashing his open palms against his forehead, he exclaimed, 'O God! this—*this* indeed is retribution!'

And at the same moment the Count of Rosenberg was ushered into the apartment.

CHAPTER XCVII.

ANGELA'S UNCLE.

The Count of Rosenberg was already prepared to hear that events of an extraordinary nature had occurred within the walls of Altendorf Castle. Previously to the arrival of Zitzka's courier at his own fortalice, he had received intelligence of the total rout of the aristocratic army; and having hastily gathered together all the ready money he could at the instant command, and all the jewels which he possessed, he was about to fly with a few faithful retainers into Austria, when the an-

nouncement of a messenger from the victorious Captain-General of the Taborites induced him to pause. The dispatch of which this courier was the bearer, and which bore the autograph of the mighty Zitzka himself, informed the Count of Rosenberg that his presence was instantaneously required at Altendorf Castle, 'upon matters of a delicate nature;' and as the document likewise pledged the word of its author for the count's personal safety and freedom, his lordship hesitated not a moment in trusting to the honor of John Zitzka. He accordingly accompanied the courier without delay; and, during the short ride from the one castle to the other, the count gleaned enough from his Taborite companion to make him aware that portentous discoveries had been made and wildly romantic mysteries elucidated in the subterraneans of Altendorf.

Nevertheless, the Count of Rosenberg had acquired no positive details in respect to these matters; and although he was fully prepared to hear of occurrences surpassing the ordinary routine of this world's events, yet he little anticipated how startling some of these explanations would prove—how closely they regarded his own family affairs—and how deeply they were calculated to touch the tenderest feelings of his soul.

But as we do not wish to dwell unnecessarily upon this portion of our tale, we will leave the reader to imagine the mingled emotions that were excited in the breast of the Count of Rosenberg, or rather, the crowds of sentiments which rapidly succeeded each other in his mind, as revelation after revelation and the clearing up of mystery after mystery burst upon him in consecutive volleys. First, how the rumors long current in Bohemia relative to the tribunal of the Bronze Statue had received a sudden and fearful confirmation, and how the dark and dreadful secrets of the subterraneans of Altendorf had been brought to light; secondly, how numerous men and women, who at different times within the last twenty years had disappeared most unaccountably from the world, had been discovered dwelling in certain apartments connected with those awful subterraneans; thirdly, how the Baroness of Altendorf, the Count of Rosenberg's own sister, had lived as a member of that sepulchre-doomed community until within the last three days, and how her remains were yet above the ground awaiting the performance of the last offices; fourthly, how John Zitzka was himself the individual on whom Ermenonda's affections were fixed in the period of *her* lovely girlhood and of *his* prepossessing youthfulness; fifthly, how Angela was the illegitimate offspring of that amour into which the strength of their mutual love betrayed them; sixthly, how this same Angela was in reality the liberatrix of the Count of Rosenberg, together with the Baron of Altendorf, and the Marquis of Schomberg, from the Castle of Prague; and seventhly, how the proud Lord of Altendorf, so long the dark and terrible chief of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue, was now stricken with remorse at the presence of that retribution which was manifested in the untimely and violent death of his only son,—these were the circumstances, these the facts that were now revealed to the ears of the Count of Rosenberg!

The first impulse of this nobleman, even while the wonderment excited by all those startling revelations still held its empire over him, was to approach Angela, press his lips upon her pure brow, and recognise her as his niece. And, illegitimate though she were, he was not more strongly impelled towards this recognition by a feeling of imperishable regard for that sister whose child the maiden was, than by a sense of gratitude and admiration towards Angela herself for the heroism of her conduct in the affair of the Castle of Prague. Then, while weeping in the arms of the uncle who had just acknowledged her so generously and whose character she had ever admired so highly, the forest-maiden felt that although an affectionate father and a kind relative had on this memorable night been given to her by heaven, yet that there was no prospect of happiness on earth for her, because her heart had become a sepulchre to entomb for evermore the image of the handsome Austrian knight!

'Towards you, General Zitzka,' said the Count of Rosenberg, extending his hand to the Taborite chieftain, 'I cannot now cherish any reminiscences of ill-feeling on account of that unhappy love which existed long years ago between yourself and Ermenonda. On the contrary,' exclaimed the nobleman, with a passionate outburst of emotion, 'would to God that she had been left to follow the dictates of her heart's desire and espouse the humble page who

then bore the name of *Zaktiz*, but whose present appellation of *Zitzka* has filled the world with its renown! Oh! had not an insensate pride and all the cold considerations of worldly-mindedness interfered with the natural flow of Ermenonda's youthful affections, how much misery would have been spared, how much horror avoided, and how different might be the position of circumstances now! But the past cannot be recalled,' added the Count of Rosenberg, his voice suddenly sinking into a solemn lowness; 'and not even to this unhappy man will I murmur a syllable of reproach, since remorse has already touched him so profoundly!'

As he uttered these last words, the nobleman bent his eyes upon the Baron of Altendorf, who was standing with folded arms and looks fixed downward—the image of despair!

Presently the door opened, and one of Zitzka's favorite attendants entered to announce that all the preparations were completed for the funeral of the Baroness of Altendorf. The Captain-General glanced inquiringly towards the Baron, and this miserable nobleman, stricken with compunction for the past and well nigh broken-hearted by the loss of his son, raised his eyes and intimated by a look that he still adhered to his promise of taking part in the mournful ceremony.

Then Hubert led the way, holding two wax tapers in his hand. The Baron of Altendorf went next; and Angela, leaning upon the arms of her father and her uncle, followed. Along the corridor did they proceed: a private staircase was descended, and the party entered the castle chapel. A door behind the altar-screen opened on the stone steps conducting down into the subterraneans;—and a circuitous route of winding passages led the party into the place of tombs without rendering it necessary for them to pass through the hall of the Bronze Statue or the chamber of the machinery.

The principal avenue of the vast cemetery was lighted with wax tapers burning in iron branches fixed to the solid stone pillars that supported the vaulted roof, and the two lines of light extended up to the grating of the marble staircase which led to the oratorio. This subterranean chapel was used for the performance of the burial service, whenever a member of the Altendorf family died, ere the coffin was borne down into the vaults to be consigned to the sepulchre prepared to receive it: and the moment that Angela reached the large iron grating leading thereto, and which now stood open, she remembered that it was from the lips of her own departed mother she had first received the explanation of the purpose to which that oratorio was appropriated.

Attendants stood ready with mourning cloaks which were instantaneously assumed by Zitzka, his daughter, the Baron of Altendorf, the Count of Rosenberg, and the old steward; and this preliminary step to the still more solemn ceremony was performed in the midst of a deep silence. The party then ascended the marble staircase and entered the oratorio, which was hung with black drapery and purposely arranged with so few lights that the aspect of the place was that of funeral dimness.

The coffin, covered with its sable pall, stood in the middle of the little chapel. On one side the male members of the late Brotherhood were ranged as mourners: on the other stood the females. The former still wore their black cloaks, the latter their white dresses of the Order of Mount Carmel. A Catholic priest stood at the altar;—for the Captain-General of the Taborites had commanded the funeral service to be performed in accordance with the Romish ritual, as a delicate and feeling homage to the religious faith of her husband, the brother, and the daughter of the deceased. Nor did the Count of Rosenberg fail to appreciate this generous concession on the part of the sturdy Reformer and stern Republican who had waged so resolute a warfare against the church of Rome and all superstitious traditions as well as feudal pomp; and if anything had been wanting to convince the Count that Zitzka was in reality a noble-minded man, this circumstance would have confirmed the fact.

The ceremony was commenced: the *De Profundis* was chaunted with a sublime solemnity by the priest and the members of the Brotherhood;—and when the usual prayers had been recited, the coffin was borne slowly away from the oratorio—down the marble steps—into the place of tombs. There it was consigned to the monument which had been raised to the memory of the deceased twenty long years before, and which was now opened to receive in reality the remains of the lamented la-

dy ;—and thus at length in that black marble tomb reposed the ill-fated Ermenonda, Baroness of Altendorf!

The ceremony was over, the mourners had retired from the vaults—the lights were extinguished therein—and day was now beginning to dawn upon the grey towers of Altendorf.

Angela had retired to the chamber prepared for her reception : the Baron had likewise sought the solitude of his own apartment ;—but John Zitzka, the Count of Rosenberg, and the old steward Hubert remained closeted together in order to give due vent to their melancholy feeling by a full outpouring of all those incidents which in any way regarded the hapless lady whose remains had just been consigned to the tomb.

We shall not record this mournful and profoundly interesting conversation precisely as it occurred, but we shall weave into a continuous thread the facts and circumstances that were then developed and discussed in detail.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE HISTORY OF ERMENONDA.

TWENTY-FIVE years previous to the date of those incidents which we have been relating, the old Count de Rosenberg was slain in a feud with some powerful neighbor. He left behind him a widow and two children, the elder of whom was a son and the younger a daughter. The son succeeded to the ancestral title and became the Count of Rosenberg, who has figured so often in our narrative; and the daughter was the lovely but unfortunate Ermenonda.

The countess was one of those women whose majestic beauty bears the stamp of an indomitable haughtiness, and whose lofty pride flashes in every glance of the large dark eyes, and proclaims itself in every smile that appears upon the lips, as well as in every movement of the stately form, and every gesture where gracefulness itself is full of queen-like dignity. Proud of her own family, which was one of the richest and oldest in all Bohemia, the countess was likewise proud of the race with which she had connected herself by marriage; and she was proud also of the handsome son and of the beauteous daughter who bore that same haughty name of Rosenberg.

At the time of their father's death the young count was about twenty-three, and Ermenonda was only fifteen. The former was indeed remarkably handsome, and the latter was of a loveliness not often paralleled. Neither appeared to inherit the lofty pride which had characterised their father, and which ruled every word and action on the part of their mother; and the condescension — or rather, the affability of their deportment towards their inferiors, won for them the regard of all the dependants and vassals on the Rosenberg estates, but sometimes drew down upon them the maternal remonstrances against what her ladyship looked upon as 'an undue familiarity with menials.' Nevertheless, with a view to render her daughter an accomplished horse-woman, the countess (who had herself been an intrepid huntress in her earlier years,) did not hesitate to send Ermenonda forth into the forest, to scamper along the shady avenue upon a beautiful pony, with perhaps only a single page in attendance upon her. The servitor thus selected to follow and take care of the young lady, had been chosen for the duty on account of his own extraordinary skill in horsemanship ; but it never once struck the Countess of Rosenberg that it was quite possible for the handsome youth of twenty to make a tender impression upon the heart of the girl of fifteen or sixteen. Her ladyship had certainly blamed both her son and daughter, more than once, for being too condescending towards their inferiors ; but it never entered the range of her calculations, much less of her fears, that the high-born daughter of the house of Rosenberg could possibly stoop to love the obscure page John Zaktiz !

Yet such was the result of the mother's imprudence in thus throwing her innocent young daughter and the handsome page so much in each other's society, and affording them opportunities of being so frequently alone together. Zaktiz was not only handsome in countenance, but was likewise tall in stature and symmetrical in form; his skill in horsemanship was remarkable — his courage in the hunt had raised the envy of the oldest sportsmen—and his experience in the use of martial weapons rendered him too dangerous to be provoked as an enemy. In addition to these qualifications which stamped him with all the attributes of the noblest chivalry, he was generous-hearted, frank in his manners, and ever ready to es-

pouse the side of the weak against the strong, when amongst his fellow-pages one might happen to ill treat another. A youth of so prepossessing an exterior, of such chivalrous qualifications, and so noble a character, was well calculated to make an impression upon the heart of a susceptible, amiable, and artless young girl such as Ermenonda was; and the sentiment grew upon her without being ever suspected, much less understood by herself. An affection thus gaining upon her, springing up in her soul like a mystic plant and entwining all its tendrils around her heart, was the highest abstraction of the holiest, purest feeling of love—stainless as it was profound—immaculate as it was indestructible! Never did man win and wear a brighter or chaster gem than that young maiden's heart! And John Zaktiz was not only the object of Ermenonda's unconscious love, but he loved her in return—loved her more ardently, more passionately, more enthusiastically, because *he* comprehended the fact that he both loved and was beloved in return, and could therefore cherish and dwell upon the feeling which he alike experienced and had inspired.

For the love of the youthful page was as honorable and as sublime as that of the still more youthful lady was pure and innocent. Men do not desire the women whom they love with a holy love, in the same way that they desire those whom they love with an ardent passion; and never did a gross idea, much less a voluptuous hope or dishonorable intention, mingle its turbid under-current with the pellucid stream of the young page's adoration for the artless Ermenonda. Nor dared he even to reveal that love, nor did the maiden herself suspect it, until accident one day raised the veil suddenly and enabled Ermenonda to read into the depths of her own heart as plainly and as lucidly as if it were a mirror that all in a moment reflected her countenance for the first time. In a word, Zaktiz was one day wounded in a boar hunt; and then Ermenonda wept bitterly and was sore afflicted; and the questions were naturally forced upon her mind wherefore she thus wept, and why she was thus afflicted.

The discovery now made respecting the state of her own mind, was like a torch guiding her understanding to the perception of the love of which she was mutually the object; and thus, the first time that the nobly-born maiden and the handsome page met after the recovery of the latter from the effects of his wound, the blushes of the former betrayed the consciousness which she now experienced relative to the sentiments existing between them. A few murmuring words of avowal were speedily exchanged; in the depths of each other's eyes did they read all that fondness which fills the hearts of youthful lovers with so much pure but ecstatic delight; there was a pressure of hands, a breathing forth of tender vows and solemn pledges, and then a meeting of the lips to seal the compact in one long, delicious, innocent kiss!

And weeks and months passed away, and Ermenonda de Rosenberg and John Zaktiz were as happy as if this earth were the promised paradise of hereafter. They lost no opportunity of being together; in the picture gallery, or the armory of the castle, in the gardens, or in the forest, Their partiality for each other did not long remain undiscovered by the dependants and vassals; but no one had the hardihood, even if he possessed the inclination, to play the part of tell-tale in any matter wherein the valorous page was concerned. Thus while the love of Ermenonda and Zaktiz became a subject of general conversation in the household of Rosenberg, the young lady's brother and mother remained totally unsuspicious of all that was going on. Alas! despite the honorable character of John Zaktiz, despite the holiness of that affection with which he regarded Ermenonda,—despite, also, the purity of her soul and the natural artlessness of her disposition,—so enthusiastic a passion, beating in the breast of vigorous youthfulness and encouraged by such manifold opportunities, could not possibly resist the temptation; and thus, in one of those moments when opportunity serves too well and temptation gathers all its force,—a moment, when the strength of the strongest-minded woman yields and the virtue of the purest and chastest is absorbed in the melting weakness of human nature,—at such a moment was it that passion proved more powerful than reason. Zaktiz erred, and Ermenonda fell!

Weeks and months again passed away, and the young lady was now approaching her seventeenth birthday. One morning her mother sent to desire her attendance in the state-apartment of Rosenberg Castle; and a mortal shivering ran through the unhappy

young lady's entire frame, for she dreaded lest a certain terrible secret should by some means or another have been detected. And yet, poor girl! the secret was one which could not be concealed much longer; and it was even strange that a mother's eyes should not have penetrated it before!

To the state-apartment she went, pale as a lily, with fluttering heart, and with looks that could scarcely control their affright. Beneath the velvet canopy surmounted in front by the coronet, and emblazoned at the back by the armorial bearings of the family, sate the countess, a superb woman even in her fiftieth winter! On her left hand stood her son, the Count of Rosenberg; and on her right was a tall man, of handsome features but dark complexion, and whose countenance was not altogether free from an air disagreeably sinister. His age might have been about seven and twenty; and he was apparelled with great magnificence.

There were no dependants in the room; and Ermenonda therefore perceived at a glance that something serious with respect to herself was in contemplation. Her half-terrified, half-deprecating look wandered from the countenance of her brother, who smiled kindly upon her, to that of her mother, who bestowed upon her such a regard of encouragement as an empress might vouchsafe to a timid vassal; and Ermenonda was at once reassured as to her own secret being undiscovered. But at the same instant the truth flashed to her mind; and she recoiled from the thought that the present ceremonial proceeding had reference to the disposal of her hand in marriage. Nor was she mistaken: for her mother, after a few high-sounding phrases relative to the necessity of her beloved daughter's making an advantageous settlement in life, and after an equally pompous and magniloquent eulogium upon the alleged virtues and merits of the individual who had proposed himself as a husband for the young lady,—the Countess, we say, having thus exhibited her oratorical powers, rose from her seat and took the dark looking stranger by the hand, exclaiming, 'My dear child, you will receive in a fitting manner the addresses of his lordship, the Baron of Altendorf.'

Throughout the quarter of an hour occupied by her mother's speech, Ermenonda had gazed upon her mother in a species of stupefaction. She was petrified—overwhelmed with consternation at the presence of an appalling calamity. She sustained herself on her legs rather by a mechanical habit than by any spontaneous effort: but had she only moved an inch or exercised the slightest power of volition over her attitude, then she must have sunk down instantaneously. A spell was on her, and the same spell sustained her all the time her mother was speaking: but the moment the Countess ceased, on introducing the Baron of Altendorf, the spell seemed suddenly lifted from off her—her limbs gave way as if every bone in them had dissolved in an instant, there was an acute sense of gushing agony through the heart, and of sweeping anguish athwart the brain, and, maddened by all the wretched feelings that thus fastened their vulture-claws and their tigress-talons upon her, she fell upon her knees, exclaiming, 'No—no—I dare not become that man's wife! I love—my God! I love another—I love John Zaktiz——and——Oh! have mercy upon me! have mercy upon me!'

And having thus spoken, with her snowy arms outstretched towards her mother, and in a tone that pierced like a sharp north wind through the brain of each of her hearers, the unfortunate Ermenonda fell senseless upon the floor. Still the truth—the fatal truth—was not suspected by either the Countess or the young lady's brother, much less by the Baron of Altendorf: but when the resident physician was summoned to the aid of the unconscious Ermenonda, his experience at once enabled him to detect that tremendous truth which his lips now unguardedly proclaimed in the presence of the Lord of Altendorf.

For Ermenonda was in the way to become a mother.

Our readers must conjecture, for we cannot find words to explain the astonishment with which this announcement was received. The Count de Rosenberg indignantly repelled the charge laid against his sister's honor, and was even about to thrust forth the physician from the apartment, when the Countess bade him moderate his anger. In fine, it was speedily discovered that the medical man had spoken the truth; and that the most important consideration now was how to hush up a secret, the discovery of which would not only bring shame down on the head of Ermenonda but likewise cause the dishonor to redound upon all who bore the hitherto untarnished name of Rosenberg.

The Baron of Altendorf of course

promised to maintain an inviolable silence; indeed, the extraordinary beauty of Ermenonda had produced such an impression upon him, that he besought her mother and brother not to treat her with harshness. The physician was easily bribed to secrecy, and John Zaktiz, the young page, was at once dismissed from Rosenberg Castle, the well known and oft-tried chivalry of his character being regarded as a sufficient guarantee that he would never divulge aught prejudicial to Ermenonda's honor.

A few days afterwards the Countess of Rosenberg, her son the Count, and the almost heart-broken young lady, repaired on a visit to Altendorf Castle. This proceeding, which to the eyes of the world wore the aspect of a mere desire between two powerful families to cultivate a friendly understanding with each other, was nevertheless adopted in order that Ermenonda's secret might be the more safely secured. For this visit not only served as an excuse for temporarily dispensing with her usual female attendants, on the ground that the hand maidens of Altendorf Castle would wait upon her during the sojourn there, but there were likewise opportunities for her complete seclusion along with her mother, which could not have been obtained at their own abode. Thus for three months did the Rosenbergs' visit to Altendorf Castle last; and during this visit was the Lady Ermenonda delivered of a female child.

All possible mystery surrounded this birth. The disposal of the babe was entrusted to Hubert, the baron's steward; and he undertook to place it in the care of some humble family, who would adopt the child without making the slightest inquiries relative to its parentage, and whose good repute should at the same time prove a guarantee for their kind and proper treatment of the innocent being. All this was done, and thus was the affair successfully hushed up. The Rosenbergs went back to their castle, and a few weeks afterwards the Baron of Altendorf arrived there to pay a return visit of a few weeks.

And now the wretched, wretched Ermenonda—having been separated from the only being whose love she valued on earth—having had even her child torn from her bosom the instant that it came into the world and nestled there,—and having, in fine, passed through mental sufferings so acute that the physical agony of child-birth had been regarded at the time with comparative indifference,—having, we say, endured so much, the unfortunate young lady was was now persecuted by the addresses of the Baron of Altendorf.

For not only was this nobleman so deeply smitten with her beauty that he experienced an ardent desire to possess her, but he also coveted the immense dowry which her late father had bequeathed to her; and thus, swayed by these considerations, the Lord of Altendorf was willing—nay, even anxious to conduct her to the altar, dishonored as he knew her to be. But she remained proof to his vows, his appeals, and his entreaties, declaring that she had plighted her faith to the father of her child, and that she would never betray the troth so solemnly given. A few weeks after she had returned this answer to the Baron of Altendorf, her mother broke to her the intelligence that the child was dead, the countess alleging that Hubert himself had secretly brought her the tidings of this catastrophe. Ermenonda retired to her own chamber to pour forth fresh floods of tears over her misfortunes; and scarcely had she somewhat recovered from the shock produced by the death of her child—scarcely, indeed, had two months elapsed since the date of that occurrence—when her mother the countess again intimated to the unhappy girl that she had tidings of an afflicting character to impart. A cold shiver swept over Ermenonda's frame, for those prefatory words had fallen from her mother's lips like icedrops upon her heart, and she already felt a presentiment that a crowning misfortune was on the point of being revealed. Nor was she mistaken, for the intelligence now communicated was the death of her lover John Zaktiz.

But Ermenonda would not believe it. She could not bring herself to recognise the truth of a calamity which would destroy the last fond hope she possessed in this world. She grew wild with grief, maddened with excitement; she raved, she became hysterical, and then delirious; and when physical exhaustion plunged her back again into a numbing, blank despair, she nevertheless persisted in still hoping on, or rather declaring that she thus hoped on against the death of hope itself! Then the countess showed her daughter a letter from Italy, the writer of which document recorded the particulars of a conflict between the Tuscans and the Romans, wherein 'a certain John Zaktiz, a Bohemian by birth, and many other foreign adventur-

ers,' were represented to have met their death. Then Ermenonda believed, and summoning all her strength of mind to her aid, she endeavored to meet the bitterness of this crowning misfortune with a spirit of holy resignation.

Soon afterwards the Countess of Rosenberg was taken dangerously ill; and when she found herself at the point of death, she sent for the Baron of Altendorf and inquired if he was still disposed to make Ermenonda his wife. The response was in the affirmative; and the countess with her last breath conjured her daughter to bestow her hand upon the baron. In fine, a promise to that effect was wrung from the lips of the bewildered, weeping, unhappy young lady; and, with a smile of triumph playing upon the features that were already corpse-like pale, did the countess surrender up the haughty spirit whose last effort even in death was the consummation of an odious tyranny with regard to her hapless daughter.

A year passed; a splendidly sculptured monument had been raised over the remains of the Countess of Rosenberg; and now the still beauteous but unhappy Ermenonda fulfilled the pledge which she had given by the side of her mother's death-bed. She accompanied the Baron of Altendorf to the altar,—and thus was this deed of self-martyrdom consummated by the hapless young lady. It is, however, but just and fair to state that the Baron of Altendorf treated Ermenonda with respect and attention, sometimes even with tenderness, and that he never alluded, even in the most distant manner, to the *one* grand secret of her life. Ten months after the marriage a son and heir was born to the vast estates and ancient halls of Altendorf; and the name of Rodolph was bestowed upon the boy.

Though grateful to her husband for the attentions with which he surrounded her, and doating upon her new-born child, yet darker became the gloom and deeper the melancholy which placed a cloud upon the brow and spread a pall over the soul of the Baroness Ermenonda. Often and often would she wander forth alone into the forest, and plunge into those solitudes which seemed congenial to her mind; and there would she walk slowly along the darkly shaded avenues, or else sit for hours together upon some mossy elevation or fallen tree, and think over the past, the terrible, harrowing, irrevocable past!

And it was on one of these occasions, about a year after the birth of Rodolph, that the baroness beheld a tall, travel-soiled, and way-worn traveller journeying on foot along the main road skirting the forest; and the moment their eyes met, ejaculations of mingled wonderment, joy, and incredulity burst from their lips,—but the next moment they were clasped in each other's arms!

CHAPTER XCIX.

CONCLUSION OF ERMENONDA'S HISTORY.

Yes, incredulity was changed into certainty all in a moment, when the lips were joined in the long, fond kiss, and when the tears, mutually shed, bedewed each other's cheeks. Then, too, murmuringly and soft, like the tremulous breeze through sweet mazes of flowers, were spoken the words, 'Dearest Zaktiz!' 'Beloved Ermenonda!' and again sounded the billing kiss, as the zephyr whispers amongst the green leaves of the grove, and the half-stifled ejaculation of joy, as the autumn wind sighs at intervals, and for a moment in a louder and deeper tone.

And then came the explanations which each was in such torturing anxiety to hear, and likewise in such feverish impatience to impart. But first Ermenonda succeeded in completing her tale, how she had become a mother at Altendorf Castle, soon after the terrible circumstances which had separated them; how the babe was torn away from her; how she was subsequently assured that it was dead; how she had also been cheated into the belief that John Zaktiz himself was no more; how she had promised at her mother's death bed to bestow her hand upon the Baron of Altendorf; how she had fulfilled this solemn pledge, and how she had borne her husband the infant Rodolph.

The announcement of the fact that Ermenonda was the wife of another, overwhelmed John Zaktiz with grief; and for some time he was unable to master his emotions and restrain his sorrow. But at length crushing his feelings altogether, rather than surmounting them merely, he proceeded to give his explanations in turn. It appeared that when the discovery of his amour with Ermenonda took place, the Count de Rosenberg sent for him to a private apartment and spoke in the en-

suing manner: 'Everything is detected, and you must leave the castle this moment. You are well aware that the distinctions of birth and social position render it impossible for my mother and myself to consent to your union with Ermenonda. As you yourself have often assured me, you are but a foundling reared by gipsies, ignorant of your parentage, and with nothing but your character and sword to depend upon. Were you, then, to inveigle Ermenonda into a marriage with you, her mother would disown her, cast her off forever, repudiate her without a remorse! I know not that I should prove so severe; but I appeal to your honor as a man, and to the love which you bear my unhappy sister, not to drag her down into deeper depths of wretchedness than those into which your fatal passion has already brought her. Take this purse—'tis heavy; take also the best horse in my stables, and go thy ways in peace!'

'Yes, I will go my ways,' responded Zaktiz; 'and I will prove how fervently I love Ermenonda by abstaining from a course which would render her an outcast from her family. Your lordship's proffer of the steed I accept; the gold I will not touch, lest it should be said that my departure was purchased and my withdrawal was procured by bribery. No, mine is a love that cannot be bought nor sold at any price!'

Having thus spoken, the noble minded youth of scarcely twenty-two years of age, hastened away from Rosenberg Castle; and soon after falling in with a troop of volunteers bound for Italy, he joined the band. On arriving in the ultra-montane peninsula, the corps in which he had enlisted entered the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, then at war with the Romans; and in a battle which shortly took place, John Zaktiz signalised himself so brilliantly that he was promoted to the head of the corps of volunteers to which he belonged. Then he wrote a letter to the Count of Rosenberg, explaining these occurrences, and imploring some intelligence with regard to the child which Ermenonda bore in her bosom, and was therefore unborn at the time he left. This letter never reached the Count of Rosenberg; but the probability was that his mother the countess had intercepted it, and had profitted by the information it contained relative to the whereabouts of John Zaktiz, in order to fabricate another document purporting to convey the intelligence of his death.

In fine, after having fought and conquered in the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Zaktiz had retraced his way across the Alps, laden with honors and presents; but a horde of banditti had stripped him of all the valuables he possessed, depriving him even of his very horse in revenge for his refusal to join their lawless gang. For several days, therefore, had he pursued his journey on foot—subsisting on the donations of the charitable peasants at whose huts he halted from time to time—but still cheered by the hope that, on his arrival in the district of Rosenberg, he should learn the welcome intelligence that Ermenonda was still unmarried!

'But now,' he observed, in a voice profoundly mournful, when he had brought the preceding explanations to a close, 'I have received the death-blow to my last hope; and henceforth the world will seem all cold and cheerless to me. In the sanctuary of my soul one deity only was enshrined. This was Love—and its temple now has become a waste and a solitude. I have not even Ambition left to urge me on in the struggle against this world's misfortunes—for I have learnt to look with suspicion upon the rulers and the great ones of the earth. And yet—and yet,' exclaimed John Zaktiz, his countenance suddenly brightening up, 'I may become an instrument in the hands of heaven to change the aspect of the world——'

'Blessed Virgin! he raves—he raves!' murmured the terrified Ermenonda, clinging timidly to the arm of that young man whom she loved so devotedly, and whose form appeared to dilate into godlike proportions, while an air of conscious mastery gave an expression of radiant heroism to his handsome countenance.

'No, dearest Ermenonda, I do not rave!' he cried. 'But I feel new thoughts and fresh aspirations springing up within me. I may not live in the hope of enjoying your love; and unless my existence have some aim and object, it will not be worth clinging to. That aim and that object, then, shall be the improvement of the condition of my fellow-creatures. How this is to be accomplished, heaven as yet only knows—and how many long years must elapse ere even the initiative in the good cause may be taken, that same Providence alone can foretell. But sooner or later the task shall be commenced—aye, and

accomplished likewise—with myself, peradventure, as a humble pioneer, if not a leader, in the work of social regeneration. Ah! you do not understand me yet, Ermenonda; but you will perhaps comprehend me one of these days. Married as you are to another, I must resign all hope of being blest by your love—unless *that other* should be snatched away prematurely, and then may our hands become joined as our hearts so long have been. But I must now bid thee farewell, my Ermenonda; it is dangerous that we should remain together—dangerous alike to thy personal safety and to thine honor! For if we were observed by prying eyes; and if scandalous tongues should recount how the Baroness of Altendorf was seen in the forest shade with a young man——'

'Oh! I comprehend all the delicacy of your behavior towards me, my well-beloved!' interrupted Ermenonda, with a passionate outburst of grief. 'But must we separate so soon? and shall we not meet again?'

'Consider, reflect, Ermenonda,' answered Zaktiz, in a low, solemn, and impressive tone; 'you are the wife of another! Not for worlds would I seduce thee from thy faith, thy troth, and thy duty towards thine husband; not for all the bliss of thy love would I lead thee into the ways of shame, dishonor, and peril! Oh! no, no; the past has taught us a lesson too bitter and too terrible not to leave the impressions of such sad experience behind. The blighted affections of thy youth, Ermenonda—my own crushed and ruined love—our dead child——'

'How know you that our child is dead?' murmured Ermenonda, in a soft and tremulous voice. 'May I not have been deceived in that instance as well as with regard to the report of your own death? and was not such deception practised in order to efface as it were all the associations which my memory cherished in reference to yourself? Yes, and the aim was to remove the obstacles that opposed my marriage with the Baron of Altendorf, and leave me no excuse and no apology for refusing my consent to that alliance.'

'But have you not already told me, dearest Ermenonda,' inquired Zaktiz, 'that the steward Hubert is a man whom you believe to possess a good heart? and has he not assured you more than once that our poor babe in reality died at the period and in the manner represented?'

'Yes,—such indeed is the case; and Hubert conceals a kind disposition beneath a cold, passionless, and impenetrable exterior,' said the baroness, in a musing tone. 'I do not think he would deceive me! And yet——'

'Listen, Ermenonda!' exclaimed John Zaktiz, as if struck by a sudden idea. 'We must now separate, your honor and security render it imperative that I should depart hence without delay! But hear me—hear me, O thou whom I have loved so tenderly and whom I shall never cease to love until I go down into the deep solitudes of the tomb! Behold this jewel,' he continued, taking from the breast of his doublet a gold ring of plain workmanship and set with a single brilliant, 'it is the only valuable which the banditti left about my person, and for the simple reason that it escaped their notice. Else had it gone with the rest. But thou wilt accept it, Ermenonda, thou wilt keep it as a memorial of him who loves thee,—and should Providence ever direct the course of circumstances in such a manner that we may meet again without dishonor or danger for yourself, then shall the ring prove a missive which I cannot fail to comprehend and a summons which I shall hasten to obey. Or again, should it happen that in the course of events and the lapse of time, thou shalt discover that our child is not dead, but still lives——'

'Oh! then will I place that ring upon the finger of our offspring and send her to claim thee as her sire!' cried the weeping Ermenonda, as she clung to the arm of her lover. 'But whither art thou going? what are thine intentions? what course dost thou purpose to pursue?'

'As yet I am not altogether decided upon those points,' responded Zaktiz. 'Whatever bread I may eat, will be that of honesty; whatever career I may carve out for myself, will be that of honor. I may languish in obscurity for years—many years, perchance; but sooner or later, as I ere now declared, shall I obtain and seize upon the opportunity of distinguishing myself and benefiting my fellow-creatures. Circumstances may compel me to adopt another name; for this is a world of vicissitude and change, and no man can tell how suddenly or how heavily misfortunes may fall upon him. But that thy memory may ever follow me,

and that it may never lose the thread of that path which I may pursue, be the understanding established between us that whatever variation circumstances may compel me to bestow upon my name, the new one I may adopt shall invariably contain the same letters as that one which I now bear! Thus, whatever may befall me, and however completely those who have known me hitherto may lose sight of me hereafter in the great world, thou wilt ever possess the clue to enable thy imagination to follow me amidst the strife, the bustle, and the contentions of society—to track me in the mazes of jarring multitudes, and to distinguish me from amongst the millions with whom I should be otherwise confounded. And now farewell, my Ermenonda, farewell until happier times—or else farewell forever!'

The Baroness of Altendorf and John Zaktiz threw themselves into each other's arms to take a last embrace; but at that same instant a troop of hunters broke forth from the forest; and a rending shriek escaped Ermenonda's lips as her eyes caught a glimpse of her husband at the head of the party.

John Zaktiz drew his sword; and, like a hunted lion turning upon its pursuers, he made head against the whole band. Ermenonda fainted when she heard the clashing of weapons; and her gallant defender was soon overpowered by numbers.

'Away with them both to the castle!' exclaimed the Baron of Altendorf,—and while one portion of the band rode off with the still insensible Ermenonda in the arms of the foremost, the infuriate nobleman advanced close up to Zaktiz and whispered to him the following words in a low, hoarse tone:—'Thou hast dishonored me, villain that thou art—doubly dishonored me; and death—a death attended with the most hideous tortures and accompanied by the most fiendish horrors that ever the ingenuity of man devised, such a death as *this*, I say, shall be your portion! Away with him to the castle!' exclaimed the baron aloud to the adherents who held the young man in their powerful grasp.

But with a sudden effort, as remarkable for the expertness as for the strength which characterised it, John Zaktiz broke away from the baron's retainers; and springing upon one of the horses whence they had dismounted, he was borne from the spot with the speed of the whirlwind. In a few moments the Lord of Altendorf and his adherents were in hot pursuit; and when, in the course of an hour, they discovered the steed on which Zaktiz had fled, lying at the point of death in the middle of the road, they made tolerably sure of recovering their prisoner. But vainly did they scour the surrounding country—vainly did they beat the adjacent woods; Ermenonda's lover had succeeded in effecting his escape.

Nevertheless, John Zaktiz *was* concealed in the very portion of the forest which was thus examined; but his agility enabled him to elude the men who were hunting him to take his life. He wandered about for several days in the vast woodlands, an awful interest and a horrible suspense attracting him each hour nearer and nearer to the walls of Altendorf Castle, in the hope of gleaning some intelligence with respect to Ermenonda. At length he heard that she was dead; and, wondering whether grief had killed her, or whether she had received foul play at the hands of her husband, the wretched young man was giving way to his bitter affliction in the midst of the forest, when he was observed and recognised by some of the very individuals who had hunted him a few days previously. Once more there was a chase in the deep shades of the woodlands; but John Zaktiz again succeeded in frustrating the murderous designs of his pursuers; and escaping from the perils that thus threatened him, he sought and found an asylum beneath the roof of Ildegardo Castle.

The manner in which he arrived at that stronghold and the generosity with which the Baron of Ildegardo received the friendless, unknown, and way-weary wanderer, have been already detailed in Bernard's History. We must, however, observe that the unfortunate young man now changed his name in order to screen himself as much as possible from the reach of the Baron of Altendorf's vengeance; and, in pursuance of the plan which he had shadowed forth to Ermenonda, he simply transposed the letters of his surname, so that *Zaktiz* became *Zitzka*. Not that he now believed, much less hoped, that there was any utility in thus adhering to that somewhat fanciful arrangement; but it nevertheless savored of a melancholy pleasure thus to fulfil a given promise and comply with an understanding pre-arranged, even though the object

thereof was now believed to be lost and the loved one to have passed into that deep grave where no sign could reach and whither no secret symbol could follow her!

But Ermenonda had not perished! Doomed by her infuriate husband, to the hideous death of the Virgin's Kiss, she was consigned to Hubert, who held the situation of Custodian of the Bronze Statue. Through his humanity the lady was saved from the appalling doom to which her husband had consigned her: but Hubert exacted from her a solemn oath that she would remain as one dead to the world so long as circumstances might demand such self-immurment in a living tomb. She accordingly became the occupant of one of the subterraneans of Altendorf; and it required but little persuasion on her part to induce the steward to rescue as many victims as possible from the doom of the Virgin's Kiss. Hence the origin of the community consisting of male and female members, and which bore the title of the *Brotherhood*. For in order to establish the strictest propriety and maintain the utmost purity of morals amongst a number of men and women whom a frightful chance and a hideous accident thus threw together, the Baroness gave a religious complexion to the community, and placed it upon a species of monastic foundation. Moreover, it was desirable that in society so strangely placed, the distinctions of rank and even personal identity should be destroyed as much as possible, so that the great lord might uot domineer over the menial, nor the high-born lady look down contemptuously upon the female of humble parentage: and thus an uniformity of apparel was introduced, the males weariug black cloaks and the females white dresses. And here we may observe that so admirable was the discipline introduced by Ermenonda into the little community, and such was the effect of that gratitude which all the members experienced towards the lady as the saviour of their lives, that every individual seemed anxious to merit her approval by a modest demeanor and a meek deportment.

The White Lady, as we called the baroness Ermenonda until the incidents of the tale made known to the readers who she really was, did not fail to question Hubert concerning many things which interested her in the world whence she was banished, and where she was believed to be dead. The growth and progress of her son Rodolph were naturally subjects of constant inquiry on her part; and in due time likewise she learnt that a certain *John Zitzka* was rising into high favor with King Wenzel. Then she knew that this was he whose image her heart had never ceased to cherish; and in her prayers did the sincerest wishes attend upon the man who was indeed carving out for himself a glorious career, and whose name was destined to occupy a brilliant page in the annals of Christendom.

The community, or Brotherhood, was duly supplied with provisions by Hubert, and as he exercised the whole and sole control, not only over the domestic affairs of the castle, but likewise over the domestic finances and the produce of the farms, he was fully enabled to purvey the requisite supplies for his subterranean friends without exciting the least suspicion in any quarter. But as the health of the Baroness soon began to suffer from the confinement of the underground chambers, Hubert allowed her to wander occasionally through the apartments above, and which belonged to the right wing of the Castle—he having previously adopted the necessary precautions, as he supposed, to prevent the intrusion of any of the numerous dependants of the household. In two or three instances, however, the baroness was seen by some of those menials; and, apparelled as she was in white garments, it was no wonder if she were taken for a spirit. The rumor soon spread that the right wing was haunted; and Hubert himself caught at the idea as the best possible means of diverting all intrusive steps from that very portion of the Castle which contained the secret avenues and modes of entrance into the subterraneans. The right wing was accordingly shut up; and the baroness was then enabled to wander more frequently and with less apprehension through the State Chambers and the apartments communicating therewith. Still she panted for the fresh air of heaven; and Hubert, after considerable entreaty, allowed her an occasional ramble in the forest. There also was she sometimes observed; and the report that the Castle of Altendorf was haunted, thus appeared to receive confirmation.

And now the reader may account—if he has not done so in his mind already—for the apparition of that white

figure which Sir Ernest de Colmar on one occasion, and Angela Wildon on another, beheld from the windows of the principal state chamber. *Never once halting, nor turning aside, nor accelerating her pace*, the baroness was wont to walk with slow and measured steps; and when it seemed that she *suddenly vanished, as if the earth had swallowed her up, or as if she had melted all in a moment into the air*, it was simply because she turned abruptly into the little chapel where the trap-door led down into the subterraneans.

The reader has already seen, from the conversation between the baroness and De Colmar's two pages, as chronicled in a preceding chapter, that the humane agency of Hubert was not always competent to rescue the condemned from the frightful penalties of the Bronze Statue. In the great majority of the cases, however, the doomed ones were saved; and thus did the members of the brotherhood gradually go on increasing.

It was about eight years after the immurement of the baroness in the subterraneans, that the three brothers Schwartz became members of the community. They were brought to the castle as victims; and it happened that the executioners of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue had recently died.

The Baron of Altendorf accordingly proposed to the brothers Schwartz to take upon themselves the horrible office; and although they at first refused with indignation, the peculiar glance which Hubert flung upon them made them recall their refusal and accept the alternative. Then, on subsequently discovering that the old steward had been instrumental in saving *them* that they might assist him in saving *others*, they knew not how to express their gratitude in terms sufficiently warm and enthusiastic. Being admitted, by his introduction, into the community, they cheerfully yielded to the conditions of its discipline; and when on a few dreadful occasions, as in the cases of the Baroness Hamelen and the Marquis of Schomberg, they could neither save the victims nor avoid the fulfilment of those functions which they had undertaken, the reader will easily believe that it went to the very souls of these three brethren to do the accursed work!

How it was that the brothers Schwartz were in the first instance doomed to the terrible death of the Virgin's Kiss, will transpire hereafter; inasmuch as their case properly belongs to the chapter which must develop the mysteries of the White Mansion and Hamelen Castle. We must now explain wherefore it was that the victims whom Hubert and the Baroness Ermenonda's humanity rescued from the Bronze Statue, were retained by them in the prisonage of the subterraneans instead of being permitted to depart secretly and fly into another country.

In the first place, there was the danger of any of these individuals being encountered and recognised by the very myrmidons of that tribunal which had sentenced them to die and which believed them to be dead; for should such meeting and recognition have ever occurred, Hubert would have been instantaneously charged with having suffered the intended victims to escape, and his own fate would have been sealed. Secondly, any discovery of that kind might have led to a search in the subterraneans; when the presence of the Baroness Ermenonda there would have been brought to light, and the previously baffled vengeance of her husband carried into real effect at last without any chance of salvation for the unhappy lady. And thirdly, the ramifications of the influence of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue were so numerous, so vast, and so widely extended, that they even spread into adjacent countries; and thus the secret flight of any of those individuals who had been rescued from its vengeance, and their settlement in a foreign clime, would still be attended with the danger of detection, no matter how profoundly they might seek to enshroud themselves in seclusion. Therefore, under all these circumstances was it imperative for the intended victims of the Bronze Statue to comply with the terms laid down by those who saved them from that hideous death; and these terms, as we have seen, were a close retirement and monastic captivity in the apartments of the subterranean.

Years and years rolled on; and it was only when advancing age made Hubert dread lest he should die without unburthening his soul of one grand and important secret, that he broke to the Baroness Ermenonda the stupendous truth hitherto so religiously concealed! This was that her daughter—the pledge of her youthful love for John Zaktiz, or rather Zitzka, as he now called himself—was alive. Angela, by this time grown up to beauteous

womanhood, was the being of whom Hubert thus spoke to the baroness; and when he assured her that her daughter was not only the joy and pride of the honest couple who had adopted her, but that she even dwelt within a few miles of the castle, the heart of Ermenonda expanded in the warmth of gushing emotions which had not been felt in many long years.

In the first excitement of these feelings, she would have flown to the cottage to embrace her daughter, to give her the ring which Zitzka had bestowed upon herself, and to send the young maiden to Prague to claim the recognition, love, and protection of a father! But Hubert was compelled, sternly compelled by the imperious circumstances which surrounded not only himself but likewise the safety of the whole Brotherhood—to reason with the baroness against each and all of the proceedings to which her maternal tenderness would have impelled her, for it was quite evident that if Angela were made the bearer of the ring to Prague, Zitzka would not be satisfied with anything short of a full and complete explanation of the circumstances which placed the jewel in her possession; and his persevering disposition would lose no time in unravelling any mystery which she might be unable to clear up.

Thus the secret of Ermenonda's existence in the subterraneans of Altendorf—the secret of the existence of the Brotherhood, and Hubert's instrumentality in rescuing so many beings from the sanguinary maw of the Bronze Statue—all these circumstances would inevitably be brought to light; and the accursed Tribunal, even though its hideous mysteries might be exposed and its power threatened with annihilation, would nevertheless, in the agonies of its last gasp, deal an appalling vengeance upon those who had previously been saved from its ferocity. Altogether the risk was too great to run—the chances too numerous against a triumph being effected over the Tribunal; and Ermenonda, being compelled to admit the force of Hubert's reasoning, abandoned with deep sobs and bitter tears the hope of embracing her daughter and of setting that beloved being in the track to discover a father!

It appeared that when Ermenonda gave birth to the pledge of her affection for the handsome but then obscure page,—a birth which was shrouded in so much secrecy, as already described, Hubert was ordered by the Baron of Altendorf to dispose of the child. He accordingly entrusted it to a poor woman dwelling upon the estate; and this poor woman, who was kept in profound ignorance whose child it was, soon afterwards handed it over to the care of the Wildons. This worthy couple, being childless, adopted the little infant with emotions of the sincerest pleasure and tenderness; and as the woman who thus gave them the child, died in the course of a short time, all clue to the parentage of the infant was lost on the part of the Wildons—the secret remaining with Hubert alone. The alleged death of the child was a mere stratagem to which the late countess of Rosenberg had recourse in order to sever the link which so naturally bound the memory of her unhappy daughter to the image of John Zaktiz; and in after years, when circumstances established a sincere friendship between Hubert and the Baroness Ermenonda, the old man shrank from the task of revealing to the unfortunate lady the fact that she had a daughter whom she might never hope to see!

But at last the steward *did* make the revelation so long postponed; and the result, as he had tremblingly foreseen, was to unsettle Ermenonda's mind and inspire it with a restlessness that rapidly rose superior to the pre-existing equanimity of Christian resignation. In order to tranquillise her as much as possible, Hubert was compelled to glean as many particulars as he readily could concerning the forest-maiden; and he learnt, at various times and by different means, all that was to be ascertained concerning the object of his guarded and secret inquiries. Thus he discovered that when the Wildons had first taken charge of Ermenonda's child in her infancy, they had bestowed upon her the name of *Angela*, in honor of the old father-confessor who had been their friend since their own childhood, and whose name was *Angelo*. From this same worthy priest did Angela, as she grew up, receive all such instruction as he was enabled to impart; and from his lips did she imbibe the precious doctrines and wholesome lessons which gave such vital strength to her own virtuous principles and furnished her mind with the purest provender for the nutriment of her reflections. The venerable ecclesiastic died; but the influence of his example and the fruits of his teachings remained.

Welcome,—most welcome were all these details to the ears of the anxious mother. But soon afterwards Hubert learnt that Lord Rodolph had seen Angela in the forest, that he had wandered for days and days together in the vicinage of the cottage in order to obtain an interview with her; and that he had therefore doubtless conceived a passion for his own sister! This intelligence the old steward felt himself bound to communicate to the baroness; and, after a long and painful consultation between the sorrow-stricken lady and the faithful Hubert, it was agreed that a written warning should be thrown in Angela's way. The baroness accordingly dictated and Hubert penned those lines which were traced upon the slip of parchment contained in the tiny bag that the poor bereaved mother worked on purpose to become its receptacle.

By a reference to the twenty-third chapter of our narrative, it will be found that the warning ran thus:—

"July, 1434.—Angela, beware of Lord Rodolph! Brightly now shines thy star in the heaven, and sweetly smiles thy guardian angel: but if the soft language of Altendorf's heir become pleasant to thine ears, and if thine eyes give back loving glances to his own, then that star will set in blood and those smiles will turn into bitter anguish. O maiden, put faith in the unseen and unknown friend who thus proffers a salutary counsel and gives a timely warning: for better, better far were it that thou should'st perish even in thy sunny youthfulness than hearken to the love tales of Rodolph of Altendorf. The curse of God would be upon thee, Angela, wert thou to accompany him to the altar!

"Maiden! to none must thou show this paper. Destroy it if thou wilt—but cherish its contents as thou would'st hold fast to thy eternal salvation. The murderer doomed to die would be an enviable being compared to thee, wert thou to neglect this solemn warning written by one who watches over thee in secret."

A year passed away from the date of this warning which was so mysterious to the forest-maiden: and behold, at the expiration of that time, Hubert one evening bore to the unfortunate baroness the afflicting tidings that Angela was a prisoner in the state chamber of the castle! This intelligence caused as much perplexity as anguish. What was to be done? To allow the maiden to remain in Rodolph's power—the sister in the hands of the brother, and they unconscious of the tie of blood existing between them—was impossible! But to accomplish her escape from the castle without exciting suspicions that would probably lead Rodolph to examine the state chamber narrowly and thus discover the means of communication with those subterraneans of whose very existence he was ignorant, and of whose horrible mysteries he was equally unaware—to assist the flight of the maiden without putting the young noble upon this awful track, was scarcely possible! Three days elapsed in bewilderment and uncertainty on the part of Hubert and the baroness: but, thanks to the secret passages and avenues of communication with the state chamber, the baroness was enabled to remain nearly all that time in the close vicinage of her daughter. At length Lord Rodolph appeared in the presence of his prisoner—the brother pleading the cause of love with the sister! The particulars of the interview need not be recapitulated: they were given in full detail in a previous chapter—and the reader will remember the young nobleman called heaven to attest his unalterable resolution to lead or drag the beauteous Angela to the altar!

This incident—so fraught with harrowing anguish for the soul of the mother who was compelled to remain an unseen and silent ear-witness of all that passed—at once determined herself and Hubert how to act. The escape of Angela must be effected at any risk and at any peril; and this proceeding was accordingly executed that very same night, and in the manner which we have detailed in an earlier stage of our narrative.

But in thus delivering her daughter from a captivity menaced with such shocking results, it was natural that the baroness should seek to render circumstances available to the idea of throwing the maiden upon the protection of the Count of Rosenberg, Ermenonda's own brother. Scarcely, however, was this project agreed upon, when Hubert imparted the tidings that the count had been arrested by Zitzka, at Prague, together with the Baron of Altendorf and another nobleman. Then came the thought of inspiring the maiden with the heroic purpose of delivering the State Prisoners from captivity—those

prisoners amongst whom were the brother and husband of Ermenonda! For Hubert, heretofore so timid in all that concerned the possibility of endangering the secrets of the subterranean community, was now inspired by a presentiment that Angela's mission would lead to the most important results—even to the destruction of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue itself!

Little more connected with the sad existence of the Baroness Ermenonda remains for us to describe—unless it be in reference to the part which she played on the occasion of the intended marriage of Queen Elizabetha and lord Rodolph. The reader will remember that Hubert was concealed in the apartment joining that of the Baron of Altendorf, when this nobleman and the Carthusian priest held a confidential discourse on divers topics and planned the above-mentioned alliance. On that occasion enough was said to convince Hubert that the unfortunate Queen Elizabetha had been despoiled of her chastity, and he was not long in communicating all he had heard to the Baroness. The lady was resolved to prevent her son from being sacrificed, through merely ambitious motives, to a woman who had lost a far fairer jewel than any of the galaxy of gems sparkling in her royal crown; and Hubert was prevailed upon to lend himself to her design. It was during the interval which then elapsed, that the Baroness observed to De Colmar's two pages, when visiting the place of tombs, that fresh sorrows had fallen upon her head. But, alas! little did she anticipate how fatal were to be the consequences of the phantasmagorian scheme which, by Hubert's connivance, was to be adopted in order to work upon the minds of the individuals chiefly concerned in the projected marriage. The existence of a secret communication behind the altar-piece with the subterraneans, was made available for the apparition of the Baroness, clothed in her Carmelite dress; and the ingenuity of a chemist, who was a member of the Brotherhood, had compounded the gunpowder and other combustible materials supplied him by Hubert for the purpose, in such a manner that the red-fire, now-a-days so commonly used for scenic effect, was then introduced for the first time. The Brothers Schwartz, whose aid was put into requisition for the occasion, raised the terrible cry which burst so suddenly on every ear, *and sounded like that of murder mingling with the northern blast!*

The plan succeeded but too well! For the unfortunate young Queen of Bohemia received her death-blow from the sudden fright;—and overwhelmed with despair at this deplorable catastrophe, the Baroness Ermenonda returned to her gloomy subterranean home. From that instant the health and spirits of the unfortunate lady declined visibly. The shock which she had experienced the previous night, on beholding the terrible death of the Baroness Hamelen, struck the first blow at a constitution already undermined by suffering; and the second horror, following so closely upon the other, fell with a cruel violence upon her head and upon her heart. Then came the siege, exciting constant alarm lest some accident should betray the existence of the Brotherhood and furnish an appalling banquet to the bloody maw of the Bronze Statue. The poignancy of these terrors was soon enhanced by the presence of famine, and thus did days and weeks pass, maintaining a constant state of feverish excitement and nervous apprehension in the bosom of that subterranean community. At length the Baroness Ermenonda's spirit fled for ever, and the members, male and female, of the association all felt as if the very countenance of Providence itself had been suddenly withdrawn in wrath, leaving them plunged in the blackest abyss of despair—till the visit of the Captain-General and Angela to their sepulchral home suddenly became the harbinger of deliverance from their captivity.

All the mysteries attendant upon the subterraneans of Altendorf Castle and the White Lady, are now made known to the reader.

CHAPTER C.

ZITZKA'S GENEROSITY AND JUSTICE.

We said that day was beginning to dawn upon the gray towers of Altendorf when John Zitzka, old Hubert, and the Count of Rosenberg sate down together to recall their reminiscences concerning the past, and interchange those explanations which they were individually and respectively enabled to give. Thus the three, by each one detailing all he knew of by-gone events,

furnished the fragmentary components of the long history that in its integral continuity occupied the two preceding chapters.

But ere we resume the main thread of our narrative, we must clear up one or two points which still remain shrouded in obscurity, and the elucidation of which may properly be undertaken at the present stage of our drama.

First and foremost, then, we should observe that throughout the brilliant career of John Zitzka, the Count of Rosenberg and the Baron of Altendorf never once dreamt for a single instant that he was the same individual whom they had known long years previously as the humble page beloved by Ermenonda. Nor when they beheld the terrible Taborite chieftain enter the council chamber of the Castle of Prague, did they once recognise the once handsome Zaktiz in the one-eyed and grim-looking Zitzka.

Secondly, when the Captain General resolved upon holding three nobles in captivity as hostages for the fulfilment of the conditions which he imposed upon the Bohemian Aristocracy relative to the Princess Elizabetha and her treasures, and when he menaced these hostages with death as the penalty for the non-fulfilment of his terms, it was natural enough that the wrongs of Ermenonda should exercise some influence over his mind and rule him in the selection of the Count of Rosenberg and the Baron of Altendorf as two of the three Bohemian peers whom he then ordered into captivity and whom he might eventually have to send to the scaffold. For although Zitzka was of too honorable a nature to travel out of the direct road in order to wreak a personal revenge against any one, or to make use of his dictatorial power as a means of persecution for private motives, yet when there *was* a legitimate opportunity of inflicting punishment upon the brother and the husband of the unfortunate Ermenonda, that brother who had so pusillanimously allowed his sister to be separated from her lover and sacrificed not only to a mother's heartless ambition, but also to a titled suitor's cupidity and lust, when a fair opportunity presented itself for chastising such men, we say, the dictates of human nature asserted their influence with success in the bosom of John Zitzka.

There is one more point on which it may perhaps be necessary to make a passing reflection; and this relates to the absence of any suspicion on the part of the Count of Rosenberg that his sister had experienced foul play when, twenty years previous to the date which our narrative has reached, she was reported to have died suddenly. But the fact was that the count placed implicit belielf in the representations made to him by his brother-in-law,—namely, that Ermenonda had been seized with a virulent malady which resembled the plague and which had carried her off in a few hours. And when it is remembered that the Baron of Altendorf had lent such material aid towards the concealment of the consequences of Ermenonda's amour with Zaktiz,—that he had subsequently made her his wife, though well acquainted not only with her love for another, but likewise of her weakness in favor of that youthful rival,—and that his conduct towards her had been kind, if not positively affectionate, from the very day of their union until that when the unhappy lady was alleged to have perished by a virulent disease,—when all these circumstances are taken into consideration, it must appear perfectly natural that the Count de Rosenberg received without suspicion the fabricated tale which the Baron of Altendorf had prepared for his ear.

And now we will resume the thread of our narrative.

Upwards of an hour and a half had elapsed since the morning first peeped forth from the eastern horizon; and now that such full and complete explanations had been interchanged, the Captain General of the Taborites prepared to turn his attention to other matters. Summoning a page he inquired whether his commands touching the Bronze Statue and the ghastly machinery were fulfilled, and the response was that the engineers of the army had already achieved the destruction of the appalling instruments of death. Indeed, it appeared that the Taborites entered upon that work with a fury which indicated the immensity of their hatred and the depth of their abhorrence with regard to the accursed tribunal, whose power was at last uprooted, and whose diabolical engine of punishment was now devoted to annihilation. For the statue—the splendid statue—was assailed with massive sledge-hammers and soon beaten into utter shapelessness; the machinery—the hideous machinery—was pulled to pieces; and the whole contrivance of a

diabolical ingenuity was flung into a furnace heated for its reception. Then the broken beams and riven cylinders of the mechanism burnt with the fury of added fuel; and the long pointed flames soon lapped the bronzed metal itself into their devouring vortex.

At Hubert's suggestion, the registers and other archives of the defunct tribunal were taken from the iron-bound closet where the baron was wont to keep them; and those memorials of accursed vengeance were also consigned to the flames.

Thus ended the diabolical sway of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue: thus perished the records of those who had met the awful doom of the Virgin's Kiss!

Scarcely were the tidings communicated to Zitzka, the Count of Rosenberg, and Hubert, that every vestige of the diabolical institution had been extirpated, when Angela made her appearance in the apartment where they were assembled. Her father and uncle received her with warm affection, the old steward with cordiality and respect,—She was pale, very pale; and there was the tremulousness of deep pathos in her fluid voice as she acknowledged and returned the greetings that welcomed her. For her heart was moved by many and varied feelings: the loss of a mother afflicted her on the one hand, the discovery of a father rejoiced her on the other: the untimely and lamentable death of Lord Rodolph, whom she had hoped to embrace as a brother, was a second source of grief, while her recognition as the niece of a nobleman whose character she had always admired, was another anodyne; then she was gladdened by the intelligence that the fatal statue with its adjunctive machinery had ceased to exist, and amidst her satisfaction on this account stole the remembrance that she loved the Austrian Knight, but was loved not in return.

A scene of bustle and interest now occurred to direct the forest maiden's thoughts for the time into another channel. For as soon as the morning meal had been hastily disposed of, the Captain General of the Taborites summoned all the members, male and female, of the brotherhood into his presence.—Then, in a brief but feeling manner, he informed them that they were free, that they might resume their lost identity, and go forth into the great world again to seek those relatives and friends who might still be living, or weep over the tombs of those who were no more. And as many amongst them would doubtless find that their former possessions were swept away, dissipated by others, or in the hands of men who doubtless had fairly purchased them from heirs believing that they had a right to sell—taking all these circumstances into consideration, and looking at all these contingencies, the Captain-General of the Taborites commanded that the immense treasures found in the vaults, and which had belonged to the late Elizabetha of Bohemia, should be equitably distributed amongst the members of the brotherhood.

Nothing could exceed the gratitude which this decision excited on the part of those individuals towards John Zitzka; and the partition of the treasure forthwith took place under the superintendence of Hubert. Then the various names of the recipients transpired; and some of the proudest as well as some of the humblest were thus proclaimed. The two pages of Sir Ernest de Colmar were specially noticed by John Zitzka; and, drawing them aside, he informed them that their master was then lying on a sick bed in the ruined Castle of Ildegardo. They rejoiced to learn that he was so near—but on the other hand they were profoundly afflicted at the tidings of his indisposition; and lastly, impatient though they were to hasten and rejoin him, they could not help making a bashful inquiry concerning the Lady Satanais and her two attendants, Linda and Beatrice.

Then a cloud suddenly appeared upon Zitzka's brow; and he was on the point of returning some answer that should check farther interrogatory on that subject, when the door of the apartment was opened abruptly, and a Taborite soldier rushed in, exclaiming, 'The Lady Gloria has escaped!'

And such was indeed the case: for, on inspecting the chamber to which she had been consigned, it was discovered that by means of the bed clothing she had lowered herself from the window on to the narrow ledge formed by the top of a buttress five-and-twenty feet beneath; that from the giddy point thus gained, the intrepid lady must have leapt across a chasm four feet in width, on to the projecting cornice of a confronting battlement; and that thence she must have descended the face of the wall itself by means of the fissures, holes, and irregularities caused by the

cannon-balls and other missiles during the late siege. In fine, it became evident beyond all possibility of a doubt that the Lady Gloria had achieved one of the most perilous tasks ever undertaken by mortal being, and that in effecting her escape she had faced dangers whence even the boldest hunter of the Alps would have shrunk appalled.

Zitzka was painfully vexed at this occurrence; and he instantaneously despatched emissaries in all directions to search for the fugitive. But he gave the instructions for this purpose with as much privacy as could be observed in such a matter; and he likewise concealed his annoyance as well as he was able: for there were many circumstances which rendered it prudent to enshroud all that regarded the romantic Gloria Ildegardo in as much secrecy as possible.

Meantime the treasure had been distributed; and the Captain-General now generously furnished all the members of the brotherhood with means of conveyance to the various destinations whither their hopes, their fears, their interests, or other circumstances, prompted them to hasten. Horses for the men and for the younger portion of the females, and litters for the few ladies who were more advanced in years or were suffering from ill health, were thus put into requisition; and by mid day the members of the brotherhood had all gone forth from the interior of that castle where their lives had been so humanely rescued from an awful doom in the first instance, where they had then endured so sad but so necessary a captivity, and whence they thus experienced so happy a deliverance at last.

We need scarcely observe that of all the rejoicing and grateful individuals thus liberated, none urged their good steeds to a quicker pace than Lionel and Konrad as they sped along the road which they had been directed to pursue, and which wound through the forests and the fields towards the ruins of Ildegardo Castle.

Having treated the brotherhood in the generous manner thus described, John Zitzka turned his attention to the disposal of the nobles, the ladies, and the garrison whom he retained prisoners. Selecting from the whole those men who were pointed out to him by Hubert as the sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue, Zitzka commanded them to be marched off at once to the frontier and banished into the Austrian territory, with the sternly enunciated threat that if any of them were ever again found and recognised within the Bohemian Republic, death would assuredly be the contingent penalty. Those nobles and ladies whom Zitzka likewise discovered to have been members of the hideous tribunal, he ordered into an immediate exile, accompanying the sentence with the same menace as in the former case; but he at once granted a free pardon to those persons —whether peers, ladies, officers, or common soldiers—whose only offence was their complicity in the late insurrection.

In the meantime the Wildons, to whom a messenger was despatched during the past night of the memorable incidents, had arrived at Altendorf Castle, where they were received with open arms by the lovely maiden who had so many strange and exciting revelations to pour into their ears.

But scarcely had Zitzka completed all the arrangements above detailed,—and scarcely had Angela time to present her adopted parents to the natural one whom she had so recently discovered, when a courier arrived at the castle with the startling intelligence that the German Hospitallers of Poland had entered Bohemia in immense force and were marching with all possible rapidity upon Prague in order to put down the Republic and hand the country over to the charge of a Papal Legate who accompanied them.

Not an instant was to be lost; nor was John Zitzka the man to hesitate for a moment. Straining his newly-found daughter in a warm, affectionate, but hasty embrace, he consigned her to the care of the Wildons; then, gathering together his glorious army, he put himself at its head, ordered the banner of Mount Tabor to be unfurled, and commenced his march that very day against the German Hospitallers.

But a sufficient garrison was left behind for the protection of Altendorf Castle in case of need; and the Lady Angela Zitzka, as she was now called, was recognised as the mistress of the vast stronghold.

The Count of Rosenberg, whom so many circumstances had tended to inspire with a fervid admiration of the character of Zitzka, gave in his adhesion to the Republican Government of the Taborites and accompanied the Captain General against the invaders.

But the Baron of Altendorf remained a captive in that castle which for centuries had belonged to the family whose name he bore, and on which his crimes had brought such indelible disgrace.

CHAPTER CI.

OUR HERO AT ILDEGARDO CASTLE.

HEAVILY and wearily passed the hours with Sir Ernest de Colmar after Angela had bade him farewell. Throughout the remainder of the day did he lie pondering upon the excellent disposition, the heroic character, and the virtuous qualities of the forest maiden; and as he began to feel more and more the gloomy monotony of that chamber in which his invalid condition retained him captive, a sentiment of sadness stole upon him. The absence of her whose voice would have sounded so cheerfully to his ear, and whose heavenly looks would have gladdened his own, was now felt with even a poignant keenness; and although the venerable Bernard came to bear the warrior company for a few hours, yet the conversation of the well-meaning old man failed to produce any enlivening influence.

The sun went down, night drew her curtain of deepest blue over the heavens, then the silver moon arose in its chill purity, and De Colmar was at length enabled to close his eyes in slumber. But throughout the many hours that he slept, the image of Angela was apparent in every dream that visited him. At one time he fancied that his guardian angel was standing by the humble pallet whereon he lay; and under this heavenly figuration he recognised the countenance of the forest maiden. At another time it was a glorious form, radiant in beauty, floating through the air high over head; and, his powers of vision penetrating through the roof, he could behold the celestial shape clad in streaming robes of azure and of white, and with a crown of beamy lustre shedding its glory upon her flowing hair. Still in the countenance, which expressed more than mortal loveliness and benignity, did he trace the lineaments of Angela; and as he ventured to smile up at her, he thought that she gave him her sweetest smile in return. Thus did her image fill his visions and play the part of heroine in every one of the dreams that his imagination conjured up; and the effect, so far from being feverishly harassing, was soothing to his soul and cheering to his spirit.

The sun was shining into the turret-chamber when De Colmar awoke in the morning; and he felt stronger, happier, and more tranquil in his mind than on the preceding day. In a few minutes old Bernard entered the room, and placing a letter in the knight's hand, he said, 'The bearer of this missive arrived soon after daybreak, but I would not disturb your excellency, as you were sleeping soundly. He has brought with him a large pannier containing all kinds of provisions, delicate luxuries, and soothing beverages, well fitted for an invalid; and he waits to know whether there be any answer for him to take back to those who sent him.'

De Colmar tore open the letter, which was fastened with red silk and sealed with wax; and the contents were found to run as follow:

"I, the undersigned, Captain General of the Taborites, send greeting to one whom I will not name for the sake of prudence, lest by any accident this letter should fall into other hands than those for which it is intended. Therefore shall I address thee in plainest terms.

"Momentous incidents have occurred, strange discoveries have taken place, and wondrous revealings have been made. The aristocratic army is annihilated: Altendorf is in my hands; and awful secrets connected with the subterraneans of the castle have been brought to light. But all these facts are less interesting and less marvellous than a particular circumstance which Providence has made known to me: namely, that Angela is my own daughter!

"From the hasty explanations which I have as yet had leisure to receive from her lips, I glean that thou art at present lying ill at ease and an invalid in the ruins of Ildegardo Castle. It being apparent that Angela knows not the great secret connected with thee, I have not betrayed it even to her; nor shall I mention it to a living soul until such time as thou shalt be beyond the frontiers of Bohemia. Therefore may'st thou without apprehension of annoyance from any quarter, suffer thyself to be removed from thy present uncomfortable lodging unto these halls of Altendorf, whence this letter is despatched,

and where all possible hospitality and comfort shall await thee. But if, on the other hand, thou art anxious to return into thine own country without delay, a suitable conveyance shall be forthwith provided.

"In the meantime I have taken leave to send thee a basket with such trifling things as my encampment affords at the instant; and my beloved Angela desires me to express her most respectful greetings.

"Thine in friendship and good-will,
"JOHN ZITZKA."

The contents of this letter were well calculated to fill the soul of Sir Ernest de Colmar with amazement. Angela Wildon, the forest maiden, the daughter of the Captain General of the Taborites! It was scarcely credible; and yet there was the statement in Zitzka's own hand writing—there was the avowal with Zitzka's own signature!

And Altendorf had fallen—it was in the hands of the Taborites, and its mysteries were disclosed! Sir Ernest de Colmar thought of the Bronze Statue and the hideous machinery—the circular chamber with the stone hassock, and all the gloomy passages and sepulchral corridors of the subterraneans; but he little dreamt what other secrets had been brought to light, or how the Baroness Ermenonda had lived until within the last few days, and was indeed the mother of Angela.

The knight did not show the letter to Bernard, because it contained the allusions to a certain secret connected with himself; but he made the old man acquainted with all the other portion of its contents.

'And Angela is the daughter of John Zitzka!' cried Bernard, so soon as he could recover from the speechless amazement into which the intelligence threw him. 'Oh! I am glad of it, I am glad of it!' he exclaimed at the expiration of a few moments, and now speaking in the thrilling enthusiasm of his honest joy. 'For she is a great lady now, and she deserves to be one! Yes, she is almost a princess, for surely her father is as great as a king; and caps shall be doffed and heads shall bend in the presence of her who but yesterday was a humble peasant-maiden! Sir Knight,' added Bernard, fixing his eyes steadfastly upon the invalid warrior's countenance, 'that sweet creature who for some weeks performed the menial but voluntary offices of a nurse to thee, may yet wed one of the proudest princes in Europe, for what sovereign will not be glad to contract an alliance with the daughter of the mighty Zitzka?'

'Even had she remained the unknown, obscure, and humble forest-maiden,' observed De Colmar, 'she would have been a gem well worthy to place in the most brilliant diadem of Europe.'

These words were uttered in a tone expressive of profound feeling; and the sentiment which they embodied appeared to occupy the warrior's thoughts for upwards of a minute. Indeed, it seemed as if the idea had sunk deeply into his own soul, and that it was no passing compliment which he paid to the absent Angela, but a sincere conviction which he felt.

'And now, your excellency, what response have you for the messenger to take back?' inquired Bernard, thus breaking in upon our hero's reverie.

'The answer must be a verbal one,' said De Colmar; 'seeing that I am at present too weak to steady my hand to write. Send word, then, good Bernard, that I acknowledge with all gratitude the courteous attentions shown and the kindly considerate offers made to me: but that I am fearful of endangering my present hopeful state of health and of retarding my progress towards complete convalescence by a premature removal hence. Much, therefore, as it would gratify me to partake of the hospitality of the Captain-General and his excellent daughter at Altendorf Castle, I must e'en make up my mind to remain here for a few days. Moreover, the groom that I despatched the night before last to Vienna, has gone for the special purpose of announcing my speedy return thither and of sending me the suitable means of conveyance after my protracted indisposition. All these particulars will you send in reply, good Bernard, to the letter of the Captain-General.'

The worthy old man accordingly quitted the turret-chamber to execute the commission entrusted to him; and for several hours did Sir Ernest de Colmar remain pondering upon the startling announcements, meagre in detail though they were, contained in Zitzka's communication.

But the afternoon was destined to bring another thrilling surprise mingled with an enthusiastic joy; for, after a visit on the part of old Bernard to

prepare the Austrian knight for the incident which was about to take place, Lionel and Konrad rushed into the turret-chamber and threw themselves upon their knees by the side of their master's couch.

* * * * * *
* * * * *

Six days afterwards, a litter, handsomely fitted up and drawn by four horses, arrived from Vienna; and Sir Ernest de Colmar, who was now altogether convalescent, took his departure from the ruins of Ildegardo Castle.

The venerable Bernard yielded to the warmest hearted proposals made by the knight to assure him a comfortable residence and happy independence for the remainder of his days; and the old man accordingly followed amongst the small but courtly retinue of dependants who had come from Vienna to escort their master home.

CHAPTER CII.

ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS THE CONCLUSION.

Several months passed away; the Winter came stripping the forest of its leaves, putting a spell upon the streamlet that babbled heretofore, and covering the gray old towers of Altendorf with snow; and then the genial breath and the smiling face of Spring returned once more. Again did the forest put forth its verdure, again did the streamlet ripple musically in its pebbly bed, and again did the battlements of Altendorf look gray in their venerable antiquity.

Yes, it was now the month of April, and the zephyr was wafting the song of the bird upon its wing; and Angela remembered—but, oh! had she ever forgotten?—the promise which the Austrian knight had made to her when she bade him farewell in the turret-chamber of Ildegardo Castle. For this was the month in which she was to expect a visit from one who had implored her to regard him as a friend and a brother!

But where is Angela living now?—and where is her father, the Captain-General of the Taborites?

The indomitable hero had marched against the Hospitallers—had annihilated their army, and had taken their general, their principal officers, and the Cardinal-Legate, prisoners. But a second force of the same warlike sect made an irruption from Poland; and in a second great battle did Zitzka scatter the invaders like chaff upon a whirlwind. Still was there a considerable reserve of Hospitallers encamped within the Polish frontier,—and the Captain General formed the heroic determination of breaking them up altogether. Fresh levies were needed for this purpose; and the interval occasioned by the gathering of recruits, was passed by Zitzka in visiting all the northern provinces of the Republic. He likewise received emissaries from the Pope relative to the ransom of the Cardinal-Legate: but the Captain-General refused to listen to any proposals of a pecuniary nature and insisted that the Pope should abandon all claim to any spiritual allegiance on the part of the Bohemians. This condition was ultimately assented to, and the Cardinal-Legate was set at liberty. Zitzka then marched against the reserve of German Hospitallers, whom he utterly annihilated after a sanguinary struggle which lasted for several weeks. Peace was thus established in Bohemia, and John Zitzka returned to Prague covered with glory and welcomed by the acclaims of enthusiastic multitudes.

We must here observe that the Baron of Altendorf had been removed to the fortalice at Prague soon after the occurrence of those incidents which placed him in the power of the Captain-General. But although Altendorf Castle had been assigned to Angela as a residence during the campaigns which her father was compelled to make against the Hospitallers—and although she might have fixed her abode, had she preferred it, at the neighboring stronghold of her uncle the Count of Rosenberg, who was serving as Zitzka's lieutenant-general in the warfare—yet she felt a longing, at the expiration of a few weeks, to return to that forest-home where she had passed so many, many many happy days of her life. Thither she accordingly repaired, accompanied by the Wildons and old Hubert; and there did she determine to fix her abode until the restoration of peace should enable her to join her father in Prague, in which city she supposed her future home was to be.

Thus was it that when the Spring returned again, it found the beauteous Angela once more a resident in that forest-cottage—she who had her choice of two stately castles! But, ah! was

there no sweet hope attached to this abiding in the humble dwelling? was there no soft and secret expectation of a surprise some day as she sate at that cottage door? Yes—assuredly these thoughts had their influence upon the pure, chaste, and candid mind of the charming Angela; for she could not possibly allow herself to imagine that the Austrian knight had so thoroughly forgotten her as not to send so much as a written word assuring her of his friendship, even if he were unable to pay her the promised visit in person.

The first week of the month of April had drawn to a close, when a courier arrived at the cottage from Prague. He was the bearer of a long and affectionate letter from the Captain General to his daughter,—a letter full of the most tender expressions and fervid assurances, and in which Zitzka begged Angela to lose no time in repairing to the metropolis, as peace was established and every arrangement made to give her a welcome reception.

With a tear in her eye and a subdued sob agitating her bosom, the maiden was compelled to give the necessary orders for departure in obedience to her sire's request; and it was settled that the journey should commence on the ensuing morning. The Wildons and old Hubert were to accompany the Lady Angela; and an escort of twelve Taborites, chosen from the garrison of Altendorf, was ordered to be in readiness to attend upon the travellers,

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when these arrangements were perfected; and Angela went slowly and mournfully forth to the threshold of the cottage to gaze for nearly the last time upon that surrounding forest which she knew so well. Into every avenue and every depth which her vision could command, as she seated herself upon the little bench in front of the dwelling, did she plunge her looks; and profound sighs escaped her breast as every spot and every point conjured up its own particular associations to her memory.

Here she had been wont to sit beneath the verdant shade, and listen to the sublime though simple teachings of Father Angelo; *there* was she accustomed to feed her pet-lamb and decorate its neck with flowers. Along *this* path had she usually galloped upon the steed which she herself had more than half trained, until De Colmar presented her with the noble animal which had since superseded the shaggy forest pony: in *that* avenue was she wont to wander when on foot, because the earliest and most charming violets grew there! In fine, every feature of the circumjacent scenery of verdure had touching memories for her; and although she was about to quit the woodland spot, in order to rejoin a beloved and loving father in a great metropolis, yet was the sentiment of sadness deepening in her soul, until it was almost verging upon a profound affliction.

For, oh! the month of April had arrived and was passing—the sunny smiles of Spring were wooing the groves to put forth their verdure, and at this moment was the soft breath of the zephyr wafting the song of the bird to Angela's ear; and yet the promise was not kept—De Colmar came not, and she was to depart on the morrow!

Such were the reflections which the maiden was dwelling upon in her deepening sadness, when — hark! what sounds are those which suddenly reach her ears and deaden the singing of the birds and the whispering of the breeze? She starts to her feet and listens—yes, listens with half-averted head, like the timid deer which is startled at the fountain by the sudden but far-off baying of the hound!

And, oh! 'tis the trampling of many horses and the ringing sound of their caparisons which Angela hears; and hope suddenly thrills through every vein as if it were a fresh infusion of life's tide, glowing and warm.

But ah! those sounds suddenly cease, as if it were a delusion that vanishes—or as if a party of horsemen, whoever they might be, had made a sudden halt. Alas! the blood was already returning cold to Angela's heart, and the thought that her ardent fancy had deceived her was just striking like an ice-chill to her very soul, when there was a rustling amongst the adjacent trees, and a single horseman, splendidly apparelled, rode forth from the forest.

The look which Angela threw upon him—that first, rapid, and almost wild look, was instantaneously followed by an ejaculation of joy which thrilled from her lips,—and then a sudden faintness came over her, as if she had just experienced a sensation of happiness which was either too great to support, or in the reality of which she dared not believe.

But the next moment the cavalier, springing from his steed, rushed forward to sustain the tottering maiden,—

and Angela was locked in the fervid embrace of that handsome Austrian knight whom she loved so well.

Oh! then the promise was fulfilled—and the day had at length come when Angela beheld him *emerging from the depths of the forest—finding her at her cottage door—and proving to her by his presence that he was no ingrate towards one whose memory he had every cause to cherish!*

'Say, didst thou expect me, dearest one?' inquired Sir Ernest de Colmar, as he gently led the maiden to the bench and seated himself by her side.

'I thought—that is, I hoped—I believed you would not forget me, Sir Knight,' murmured Angela, whose heart was almost too full to allow her tongue to give utterance to anything,—for the tenderness of that phrase whereby he had addressed her,—the words, 'dearest one,' seemed as if they had been sent forth as an avowal!

'Oh! did you ever for an instant deem it possible that I could forget you, Angela?' exclaimed De Colmar, his handsome countenance becoming still more animated with manly beauty as it reflected the supreme joy which filled his soul. 'No, never, never even for a moment have I ceased to think of you; and now I am come, not merely to renew the pledge of friendship which I before gave thee, not only for the purpose of reiterating all the gratitude which I experience towards her who saved my life so often! No, it is not for such purposes as these that I have sought thee, sweet maiden, in thy forest home. But it is,' continued De Colmar, the animation of his countenance now becoming radiant as if with a glory,—'it is to tell thee that I cannot live without thy companionship,—that the mad passion with which *another* had for a season inspired me by the power of dazzling the imagination and bewildering the mind, has yielded to the holier, chaster, and more durable affection which thy noble disposition and excellent qualities are so well calculated to inspire,—and that if thou canst love me in return, Angela, I offer thee my hand as I solemnly swear that thou already possessest my heart!'

The maiden could not reply in words; but the look which she cast upon the warrior, as she raised her blushing countenance for a moment, and then concealed it upon *his* shoulder, as he caught her to his breast,—that look spoke far more eloquently than volumes could have done, of a happiness transcending all previous experience of human bliss, and of a joy so ineffably ecstatic that it almost seemed to be a feeling which could only exist in a dream.

'Then, thou art mine,—thou art mine!' exclaimed Sir Ernest de Colmar, in a tone full of exultation.

At the same instant the Wildons came forth from the cottage, and they immediately recognised the warrior who had rescued Angela from the power of Lord Rodolph one evening in the middle of the preceding year; and Hubert, who followed close behind the worthy couple, as readily called to recollection the handsome countenance of the Austrian knight whom the late Lord Rodolph had consigned, on a certain occasion, to the State Chamber of Altendorf Castle.

And at the same moment that the Wildons and old Hubert issued from the cottage and became lost in amazement to behold Angela clinging in tender confidence and loving reliance to the arm of that cavalier whose air was so noble, whose apparel was so rich, and whose mien was so god-like,—at the same moment, we say, did a party of gorgeously clad nobles and elegantly attired ladies emerge from the forest and advance towards the humble dwelling.

Then, as these mighty Austrian peers and those high-born ladies drew near to the spot where De Colmar, having risen from the bench, was now supporting Angela on his arm, every plumed hat was doffed and every knee was bent, as the brilliant retinue formed a semicircle in front of the cottage portico.

'My lords and ladies,' exclaimed De Colmar, drawing himself up to the full of his commanding height, and with a deepening flush and a glowing animation of mingled triumph and joy, and noble pride upon his features—'my lords and ladies, behold the great Zitzka's daughter, whom I have claimed as my bride! And, oh!' he continued, in a tone swelling with the loftiest and most exalting feelings, 'if ever I had cause to rejoice in my imperial rank, it is now that I offer to share the most elevated of earthly thrones with the most amiable, heroic, and virtuous of women!'

In wild amazement and even in painful bewilderment did Angela raise her blushing face and cast her swimming eyes around her. On one side she be-

held the splendid retinue of lords and ladies, the former all with cap in hand and the latter evincing in their graceful attitudes the most profound respect: on the other side she saw the Wildons and Hubert sinking upon their knees, as the truth relative to De Colmar burst upon their comprehension. Then, almost in wild affright, did Angela lift her eyes suddenly towards the countenance of him who spoke of her as his future bride and whose arm sustained her now so fondly.

'Yes, dearest one,' he said, 'the season of mystery and concealment is past. Heaven has destined thy virtues to receive the grandest recompense which this world can bestow; and the lofty position to which thou art soon to be elevated will open to thee wider and more numerous channels for the exercise of thy beneficence, thy sympathy, and thy goodness. Oh! canst thou not understand me yet, dearest one?' cried the hero, with a smile; 'or must I proclaim to thee in as many words, that he whom thou didst first know and love as De Colmar, is Albert Emperor of Germany?'

'Oh! surely—surely all this must be a dream—a delicious dream, from which there will be a sad waking!' murmured Angela, in a faint and stifling tone—and she would have sunk upon the ground had not the Emperor sustained her fondly in his arms.

'No, it is not a vision—it is a scene full of joyous truthfulness for us all,' he exclaimed, imprinting a kiss upon her polished brow.

'Long live Angela, the future Empress of Germany!' was the thrilling cry that then rose from the peers and the ladies assembled around: and the forest-maiden could no longer doubt the extent of the happiness which was now her own.

CHAPTER CIII.

AIX-LA-CHAPELLE.

A COUPLE of months after the incident just related, and when the sultry breath of June had succeeded the gentle zephyr of Spring, two grand ceremonies took place at Aix-la Chapelle, the capital of imperial Germany. One was the marriage of the Emperor Albert with the Lady Angela Zitzka, who thus became Empress of Germany; and the other was the coronation of the happy couple and their installation upon the throne of the Cæsars.

The nuptials were celebrated in that venerable cathedral which contained the tomb of its founder, the mighty Charlemagne, and where, in monuments of marble and of bronze, reposed the ashes of so many monarchs and heroes whose names are recorded in history.

Grand, gorgeous and brilliant was the spectacle on the occasion when the forest-maiden became the imperial Albert's bride. The ceremony was performed in the evening, and the interior of the vast minster was a blaze of light. From every massive pillar projected golden branches containing wax tapers: chandeliers were suspended by silken cords to the lofty roof; on the altars of all the chapels and in the niches dedicated to the various saints, candles were burning. The marble pavement was spread with purple velvet; the walls were hung with banners, rich drapery, and long festoons of flowers. The atmosphere of the season was tempered in its warmth by the chill of the huge fabric of stone and by the currents of air which swept from the vaulted cloisters; and the perfume of flowers mingled with the delicious odor of the frankincense. The brilliant light shed from the innumerable tapers, was reflected in the diamonds that gleamed above the brow or shone upon the dazzling neck of beauty; the costly apparel of the spectators, the joyous flashings of fair women's eyes, the decorations of the altar, and the pomp of the sacerdotal dignitaries—all combined to render the scene at once splendid, imposing and overpowering.

The great officers of the empire and several of the petty princes of Germany were present on this occasion. A long retinue of nobles, knights and pages, was in attendance upon the emperor; and a train of high-born peeresses and elegant damsels constituted the suite of the Lady Angela Zitzka. In the imperial retinue might be seen the young and handsome Count Lionel Arlon, and the equally well-favored and youthful Baron Konrad de Pirna: but a slight tinge of melancholy was visible upon their countenances—for they thought, the former of the charming Linda, and the latter of the beauteous Beatrice!

In the front rank of a gallery of seats amphitheatrically arranged on the right hand of the altar, sate the worthy Wil-

don and his wife. The golden bugle which the kind-hearted man wore suspended to his embroidered belt, was the symbol of the high office to which he had been promoted by the emperor; for Wildon was now the Imperial Ranger of all the forests of Germany. Both himself and his wife were apparelled in a manner becoming that elevated rank to which they had thus been raised, and to which they did honor by their probity, their goodness of disposition, and their many virtues; but the smiles of ineffable happiness which now played upon their countenances, owed not their source to any exclusive feeling of gratification at their own good fortune, but to that supreme delight and honest pride which they experienced at beholding a ceremony of such transcendent grandeur and of which the heroine was she whom for so many years they had cherished as their own adopted daughter!

And the venerable Bernard, too, was placed on the front seat of the amphitheatre. By virtue of the office of Grand Seneschal, to which he had been appointed in the imperial household, he held the rank of a peer, and was on the same footing with Wildon. Yes, and on the foremost bench there was another old friend whom the reader will not fail to recognise—the humane Hubert, so many years the steward of Altendorf Castle, and now governor of the imperial palace at Aix-la-Chapelle.

Ah! little thought the Wildons, even when in their most joyous moments they were wont to gaze in admiration upon Angela's modest beauty, and by their looks express their honest pride at being allowed to love so charming a creature and knowing that they were loved by her in return,—little thought Hubert, even when, yielding to the influence of a dream, he cherished the presentiment that the forest maiden was born to fulfil great destinies,—and little, also, thought the worthy Bernard when, in the generous enthusiasm of his admiration for the beauteous Angela, he declared that any prince or potentate of Europe might be proud to claim her as a bride,—little did they all think that the most splendid diadem of Christendom was one day to descend upon her brows, and that her feet were destined to ascend the steps of the loftiest throne in the universe.

But where was John Zitzka, the father of the blushing bride? where was that mighty chieftain who loved his beauteous daughter so tenderly and so well? He was not present upon this occasion—he was not even at Aix-la-Chapelle, nor near that imperial city; but he was at Prague, the seat of his own republican government—the fair Bohemian capital. Was he, then, averse to the brilliant alliance which his daughter was now forming? did he discountenance her union with the object of her love? No, he rejoiced, unfeignedly rejoiced, in the bliss which thus crowned the maiden's tenderest affections; and, all republican though he were, he would have been something more than mortal had he not experienced a sentiment of mingled pride, joy, and satisfaction at this elevation of the dead Ermenonda's darling child to a position so immeasurably above the reach of all adversity!

The great Zitzka, therefore, had unhesitatingly consented to this brilliant alliance; not only because it placed his daughter in a safe, sure, and prosperous position for the remainder of her life, but also because he would not for worlds have stamped her unhappiness by a despotic interference with the natural flow of her heart's best and purest affections—and likewise because he entertained the highest personal esteem and admiration for the chivalrous, frank, and enlightened character of the Emperor Albert. The Captain General had therefore consented to this alliance, and consented with a joy which he did not for an instant endeavor to dissemble; but he felt that it would be inconsistent for him to be present at either the marriage or the coronation, the former being celebrated according to that Roman ritual against which the Taborites were so utterly opposed, and the latter constituting an intrinsic element of that royal or imperial pageantry which was so abhorrent to the true republican mind. Thus was it that Zitzka remained at Prague, but his blessing had been bestowed on Angela ere she quitted her native land to become the emperor's bride.

And now, behold! she stands at the altar in the venerable cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle; and her uncle, the Count de Rosenberg, is there to bestow her upon the imperial claimant for her hand. The Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, supported by six other prelates and attended by a large body of inferior clergymen, officiates upon the occasion.—Never has the beautiful, blushing Angela appeared more lovely than now, robed in virgin white, with pearls upon

her stainless neck and diamonds on her glossy chesnut hair; never has the chivalrous Albert shone to greater advantage as the personification of all that ideal perfection of countenance and mind, which Angela herself had conceived in the purity of her virginal thoughts ere she had even known him.

Thus was it that he whom in the beginning she had loved as the humble Sir Ernest de Colmar, and whose handsome person and manly character had so fully corresponded with all her preconceived notions of what a true hero ought to be,—thus was it, we say, that the object of her girlhood's prescient dream, and of her woman's devoted love, was now by her side at the altar of God, to exchange with her those fond and holy vows which were to unite them for evermore. And not as the humble knight was it that he claimed her as a bride—not as the comparatively obscure Sir Ernest de Colmar was it that he now made her the partner of his fortunes. But it was as a Sovereign Prince—aye, and one who was placed above princes—it was as a potentate greater than a king,—it was as an Emperor that he became her husband at that altar; and she who knelt as Angela Zitzka to receive the nuptial benediction, rose at the conclusion of the ceremony to be saluted as the Empress of Germany!

On the following morning Aix-la-Chapelle was gay, and lively, and bustling once more; and from an early hour the crowds were flocking towards the old cathedral. The streets were strown with flowers, rich drapery and banners hung from the windows, and numerous triumphal arches were erected in the thoroughfares from the imperial palace to the gothic entrance of the minister. The casements and balconies were thronged with spectators anxious to behold the expected procession; the streets were lined with guards of honor; the bells of all the churches sent forth joyous peals, and the thrilling sounds of martial music mingled with those volleys of metallic notes that went vibrating in such quick succession through the air.

And now, hark! the roar of the cannon booms from the rampart; 'tis the signal that the imperial cortege has left the palace! Through the main streets does the procession come—a brilliant cavalcade of nobles and knights, titled dames and lovely damsels, pages and squires,—and in the midst the observed of all observers, the emperor and his blooming, blushing bride!

The cannon thunders its salute through the town,—the bells ring,—the music plays, the crowds uplift their voices to the skies, while onward to the venerable ecclesiastic pile they procession goes. Not again does the reader require to be informed that Angela looked surpassingly beautiful or that the emperor was god-like in his masculine comeliness, as they rode their superbly caparisoned steeds through the crowded thoroughfares, and as they gracefully acknowledged the salutations of the admiring multitudes.

And now, beneath the groined roof of that cathedral church over which seven centuries had passed, seated upon thrones covered with the imperial purple,—and in the presence of the same dignitaries, princes, attendants, and friends who had thronged the vast minister on the preceding evening,—the emperor and empress were solemnly crowned by the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna.

Then, upon that day, the details of the coronation were duly entered in the Archives of Germany; and the glowing account was recorded how the heads of the imperial votaries were anointed with oil blessed by the Pope—how the orbs and sceptres were placed in their hands, and how the purple robes, lined with ermine, were thrown over their shoulders by the lords and ladies-in-waiting. And in that same huge register, the names and titles of the imperial couple were thus specified by the Keeper of the Archives:—

'Albert Ernest Louis, *Knight of Colmar, Baron of Hazburgh, Sovereign Duke of Austria, King of Hungary, and Emperor of Germany.*

'Angela Wildon Zitzka, *Lady of Colmar, Baroness of Hazburgh, Sovereign Duchess of Austria, Queen of Hungary, and Empress of Germany.*'

The ceremony of the coronation being over, the emperor and empress quitted the cathedral, attended by their suite; the procession, being formed anew, returned to the imperial palace, amidst the din of roaring artillery, pealing bells, thrilling music, and applauding multitudes; and the remainder of the day was spent in festivity and rejoicing at Aix-la-Chapelle.

A month passed away—thirty days flitting like a dream, so complete was the happiness of the emperor and his charming empress; and at the expira-

tion of that period an incident occurred which led to the solution of many matters that still were involved in the deepest mystery.

The imperial Albert and Angela were one evening walking together in the private gardens of the palace, inhaling the breeze that was fraught with the perfume of flowers, and enjoying the delight of free and unshackled discourse with each other, apart from the state, pomp and ceremony by which they were so generally surrounded. They were conversing upon those past events of which they both had a knowledge and wherein they were alike interested, when Count Lionel Arlon was observed advancing towards them from the palace.

His pace was light and rapid, and, as he drew near, it became evident that some happy occurrence had inspired his soul with the joy which was now so radiantly reflected in his countenance. Even his profound respect for the emperor and empress could not induce him to moderate his speed nor control the expression of his features as he accosted the imperial couple; but both Albert and Angela were too well able to appreciate his fidelity and attachment towards them, as they were likewise too sensible, to be annoyed at the little breach of courtly etiquette of which he was guilty in thus breaking upon their privacy.

'Something has happened to give you pleasure, my good Lionel,' exclaimed the emperor, 'and I rejoice unfeignedly thereat. His lordship has suddenly become an altered being,' added the monarch, turning with a smile towards Angela; 'for we have observed that both himself and Lord Konrad de Pirna have worn a cloud upon their countenances while all the other members of our court have shared in the general rejoicings.'

'Did not your majesty, once make mention in my hearing of certain fair damsels named Linda and Beatrice?' inquired Angela, with a smile of good humored archness.

'To be sure!' ejaculated the emperor. 'Has your lordship received any tidings relative to those charming sisters?'

'May it please your imperial majesties,' replied the youthful noble, 'the damsels of whom you have spoken are at this moment in the palace, and Konrad is now with them. Nor should I have been willing to quit their sweet company so soon, even for an instant—much less should I have dreamt of intruding upon the privacy of your majesties—had it not been——'

And Lord Lionel, becoming suddenly embarrassed by a reminiscence that flashed to his mind, he stopped short and glanced with furtive uneasiness at the empress.

'Ah! I understand you!' ejaculated the emperor, instantaneously struck by Lionel's manner. 'Those fair sisters have doubtless come to Aix-la-Chapelle for the purpose of communicating to me some message from a lady who, as the great Zitzka's niece, bears the relationship of cousin to her imperial majesty;' and as Albert thus spoke, he looked towards the countenance of his bride, who leant upon his arm.

'The sisters Linda and Beatrice are the bearers of no message to your majesty,' said Count Lionel Arlon; 'but their mistress—the Lady Gloria——'

'If my cousin, the Lady Gloria, be a visitress at the palace, she must receive a worthy and suitable reception,' hastily exclaimed the Empress Angela: then, in a hasty tone she whispered to her husband, 'You know, dear Albert, that whatever her faults—I dare not call them crimes—may have been, she was subjected to no common influences—was the prey of circumstances of no ordinary nature—and must not therefore be judged by the usual standard.'

'You are an angel of goodness and mercy!' said the emperor, speaking hurriedly aside to his beloved empress, but in a voice which, though low, was full of a gushing and fervid enthusiasm; then, turning again towards Count Lionel Arlon, he exclaimed, 'Let the Lady Gloria be conducted to one of her majesty's private apartments, and we will be with her in a few minutes.'

The young nobleman bowed and retired; and at the expiration of a short interval the emperor and empress repaired, unattended and alone together, to the saloon in which Gloria Ildegardo was anxiously awaiting their presence.

She was attired in deep black; her cheeks were pale, almost to a total absence of vital coloring; but the eyes had not lost their supernal lustre, nor the lips their scarlet brightness. No, nor had the silken luxuriance of her hair abated one tint of its refulgent glory. The sable velvet which robed her splendid form, and the black veil which flowed from a tiara of jet that crowned her head, set forth the trans-

parent delicacy of her complexion to its utmost advantage. A deep shade of melancholy rested upon her countenance,—and when her lustrous eyes had flashed from beneath their dark fringes, as she threw a quick and agitated glance upon the emperor and empress as they entered the apartment, her features were for a single moment convulsed with a strong expression of anguish thrown up from the deepest confines of the soul.

And for an instant also did a flight of wildering memories sweep across the brain of the emperor, and a flood of powerful emotions pour through his heart, as he found himself once more standing face to face with that wildly romantic and supernally beautiful creature, who had loved him so enthusiastically, and who, under the guise of Satanais, had held so dominant a sway over his affections in return.

But not a feeling akin to any that was past—not an emotion more tender than that of pity—was now excited in the breast of the emperor; nor did his charming empress experience the slightest sentiment of jealous annoyance at this meeting between her cousin and her husband.

For she knew that, however strangely the imagination of her Albert might have been dszzled for a season by the guile, the witchery, and the artifice practised by Gloria for the purpose,—yet that when he had awoke from that delusive dream, he had found it was not a veritable love which he had felt, but an enchantment to which he had been subjected—not a true and sincere bestowal of the heart, but a thraldom in which his imagination had been restrained. And, in addition to all this, Angela knew that *she*—and she *alone*—poscessed the imperial Albert's heart, and enjoyed his love; and she was, therefore, too confident in the strength of his attachment, too sure that Gloria was capable of inspiring no other feeling than that of commisseration,—and too full of an honest and justifiable trust in the influence of her own virtues, her own personal attractions, and her own devoted love, to be even able to descend for a single instant to the mean, petty, and unworthy sentiment of jealousy.

Therefore was it with a most delicate appreciation of the transitory embarrassment which naturally seized upon her husband, and with a view to rescue Gloria likewise with all possible speed from any depth of emotion into which a crowd of reminiscences might plunge her, that the empress accosted her with an admirable commingling of dignified grace, friendly feeling, and generous reassurance.

'Dear cousin, thou art welcome here,' said Angela, taking the hand of Gloria Ildegardo. 'If you have griefs to assuage, we will become your consolers; if you have enemies to dread, we will show ourselves your defenders,—and if you need the delicious solace of a home, you shall find it beneath our roof. In all this I do but speak my Albert's own sentiments.'

'Such is indeed the case, Angela,' observed the emperor. 'The past, Gloria, may be altogether forgotten—yes, forgotten in every respect,' he added emphatically, 'and the future alone need occupy your thoughts.'

'Yes,—but that future may not be passed beneath your roof, nor in your society,' said the Daughter of Glory, in that clear, rich, and harmonious voice which sounded like a golden bell, but which was now low, deep, and tremulous in its tone. 'And yet I thank you, Albert, thank you also, Angela, for the noble offer you have thus made, and the sympathy which your looks, your words, and your manner testify on my behalf. There was a time, Angela, when I hated you, when I could even have taken your life—aye, and the life also of that great man who is *your* father and *my* uncle! But that time has gone by, and I love you well *now*. I do not envy you your high position,—I am not jealous of you on account of the imperial throne on which you sit and the gemmed diadem which crowns your brows; but I envy you the love of him whose heart you possess, and who hath raised thee to this lofty eminence! May ye both be happy; 'tis Gloria Ildegardo who now wishes you well, and bestows upon you her blessing!'

As she gave utterance to these concluding words of her speech, her voice grew more and more tremulous; and, turning her head aside the beauteous being dashed away the crystal drops from her lustrous eyes.

The empress was likewise affected to tears; and we need hardly add that the generous soul of the imperial Albert was also moved.

'The visit which I am now paying you is transitory,' resumed Gloria, after a short pause, during which she regained more firmness than she had yet displayed on this occasion,—'and I am

anxious to render it as brief as it may be. This sable garb which I wear is a penitential mourning assumed for the purpose of weaning my thoughts as much as possible from those worldly hopes and aspirations which have been the causes of my misfortunes, and my crimes,' she added, her voice suddenly sinking to a scarcely audible whisper. 'I vowed to wear it for one year, and I shall keep the pledge. When I assume it in the morning, I think of all that has passed, and I am led to deplore many actions of my life; when I lay it aside in the evening, I am reminded that there is a Being who has borne me harmless through many and signal dangers, and I pray to Him in thanksgiving and in hope. Thus you perceive that I have grown more serious than I lately was! And it has been this altered frame of mind which prompted me to visit Aix-la-Chapelle, for two special purposes.

'Name them, fair cousin,' said Angela, perceiving that Gloria paused. 'Is there aught wherein we can serve thy views or forward thy wishes?'

'Tell me, my kind friends,' continued the Daughter of Glory, 'tell me whether you believe that Count Lionel Arlon and Baron Konrad de Pirna entertain a sincere and honorable affection for my charming and virtuous handmaidens, Linda and Beatrice?'

'Truly and conscientiously can we answer you in the affirmative, Gloria,' said the emperor, 'and even if you be decided to leave us, I scarcely fancy that my two favorite followers will suffer your handmaidens to accompany you.'

'Then do I cheerfully and willingly entrust the destinies of those two well-beloved and faithful girls to you, my sweet cousin,' continued Gloria, taking the hand of the empress and clasping it with a kindly warmth. 'One of the objects of my visit to Aix-la-Chapelle is thus fulfilled to my unfeigned satisfaction; the other will be accomplished by the simple fact of placing these manuscripts in your possession, Albert.'

And producing a roll of papers, the Daughter of Glory turned towards the emperor and placed them in his hand.

'What documents are these, Gloria?' he inquired, though more than half suspecting what the reply would be—for the rapid glance which he threw over the superscription addressed to himself, showed him that the manuscripts were in a beautifully fluid feminine handwriting.

'Those papers contain revelations and explanations which will clear up the many points in my history that yet remain involved in darkness and obscurity,' responded Gloria. 'They likewise bear allusion to circumstances which nearly regard yourself,' she continued, still addressing her words to the emperor; then, after a brief pause, she said, 'And now that I have accomplished my double purpose in visiting your imperial capital—now that I have ensured the happiness of the two faithful girls who love me, and that I have placed in your hands a key to all past mysteries—I must say farewell.'

She averted her head for a few moments; the sob that she endeavored to stifle in her bosom ere it mounted to her throat, was seen to convulse her superbly arching neck, and then she passed her fair white hand hurriedly across her eyes.

'Farewell, my cousin Angela—farewell Albert of Germany!' she murmured, taking the hands of the emperor and empress simultaneously in her own; and pressing them fervidly and lingeringly, she at the same time bent upon the imperial couple a look full of a soft and mournful envy which could neither alarm nor offend.

Then, suddenly dropping their hands, she hurried from the apartment.

To the room where Linda and Beatrice were conversing with Lionel Arlon and Konrad de Pirna, did the Daughter of Glory hastily repair: and having informed the astonished maidens, in a few rapidly whispered but earnest words, that their future welfare would be the care of the empress, she bade them farewell. With difficulty was it, however, that she could disengage herself from the arms of the weeping damsels, who clung to their beloved mistress imploring her to remain: but at length bursting away from their passionate embraces, she threw her veil over her countenance, mounted the palfrey which had borne her thither, and departed alone, unattended and in tears!

The sun was setting behind the western hills as the Daughter of Glory rode forth from the eastern gate of Aix-la-Chapelle; and when the drawbridge of the moat was traversed, she reined in her steed for a moment and paused upon an eminence to throw back one last lingering look upon the imperial city.

High above the myriads of circumja-

cent buildings towered the palatial edifice which she had so recently quitted; and as the last beams of the setting sun brought forth its gilded pinnacles in bright relief, though she saw them somewhat dimly through the tears that filled her eyes, she exclaimed in the vibrating harmony of her golden voice, 'Farewell, thou proud palace whose roof now shelters the head of the only man I ever loved or ever shall love!'

Then, abruptly averting her head from the imperial city, as if no longer able to trust her own feelings in the contemplation of that spot which contained all she held dear in this life, Gloria Ildegardo urged forward the agile palfrey, and with tearful eyes pursued her solitary way.

That evening, ere he retired to rest, the Emperor Albert went carefully through the documents which the beauteous wanderer had placed in his hand; and the startling revelations—the scarcely credible disclosures, and the wondrous mysteries which were now brought to light, added to his former gleanings in respect to Gloria, made up the complete and continuous thread of her romantic history.

CHAPTER CIV

EXPLANATIONS OF THE PAST.

The reader will be pleased to remember that the Baroness Emilia Ildegardo died in a humble dwelling in the vicinity of Prague, shortly after the discovery that John Zitzka was her own brother. She left to his care the only joy of her heart, the beautiful and well-beloved Gloria, then a child of little more than nine years old; and it will likewise be recollected that Zitzka promised to fulfil the parental vow which even before her birth had dedicated his niece to the seclusion of a convent. In the meantime he placed her in a respectable family with whom he was acquainted; and as she still continued to bear the name of *Marietta*, there was little danger that the myrmidons of the Bronze Statue would discover that the daughter of Gloria was still alive and concealed under that appellation.

When Gloria was sixteen, she was placed in a convent at a considerable distance from Prague. Indeed, it was in the immediate vicinage of that wood where the Taborites were encamped on the occasion when we first introduced them to the reader's notice. The abbess at that religious institution had been strongly recommended to Zitzka as a lady who would devote a maternal tenderness to his beloved niece; and from this circumstance arose Gloria's entrance into that particular convent.—Little indeed did her uncle dream that beneath an air of urbanity, meekness, and Christian love, the abbess nursed the most worldly ideas, and that she was a woman capable of any despotism, cruelty, or injustice, either to crush those whom she disliked, or to aid those with whom she was secretly leagued. In a word, she was one of the most enthusiastic, zealous, and uncompromising votaries of the tribunal of the Bronze Statue.

The reader has already seen that Father Cyprian was a frequent visitor to that part of the country, and that he indeed possessed a habitation in the southern province. He was therefore no unfrequent visitor to the convent; and on these occasions he was accustomed to perform the duties of father confessor, in order to glean from the nuns any circumstances that might deserve the cognizance of the tribunal of which he was so influential a member. For it was a portion of the procedure of that tremendous organization to make one member play the part of spy upon another, so that a complete system of terrorism might overawe them all, and thus prevent the betrayal of the tribunal's secrets. Moreover, by occasionally confessing the nuns, Father Cyprian was enabled insidiously to prepare novices and new-comers for ultimate initiation into the mysteries of the Bronze Statue, and thereby recruit the ranks of its female votaries.

Shortly after Gloria's admission into the convent, Father Cyprian paid the establishment a visit; and he was instantaneously struck by the marvellous beauty of the young novice. His passion was fired almost to madness, and he burned to possess her. By the aid of the confessional box he gradually elicited from her all her past history; and while she, in the artlessness of her inexperience, believed that she was confiding her family's misfortunes to a holy minister of the gospel, who would afford her the purest sympathy and the most sacred solace, she was in reality revealing her ante-natal doom to a member of that very Bronze Statue which was the object of her constant

terror. In a word, Father Cyprian thus discovered that her name was Gloria Ildegardo, and not Marietta; and likewise that she had been dedicated before she was born to the service of the tremendous tribunal whereof his friend and patron the Baron of Altendorf was the chief.

But Father Cyprian did not communicate this discovery to the baron. He knew that if he were to do so, his lordship would claim the right of disposing of Gloria in any manner which he might deem suitable to the furtherance of the secret and terrible interests of the tribunal. Perhaps the baron would have taken her from the convent and bestowed her in marriage upon some powerful chieftain whose adhesion to the tribunal it was desirable to secure, and which aim was likely to be accomplished through the fascinations of a charming wife, already initiated in its appalling mysteries; or perhaps he himself might become enamored of her, and make her his bride or his mistress; or again, perhaps he might even choose to bestow her in marriage upon his own son, Lord Rodolph. All these considerations, therefore, prompted Father Cyprian to keep his own counsel relative to the discovery he had made respecting the identity of the novice Marietta with the Lady Gloria Ildegardo.

The wily priest soon fathomed all the depths of the young maiden's mind; for indeed she was then too artless and innocent to attempt any concealment or practise any hypocrisy. He saw that she possessed both natural and acquired morality, and that her maiden pride would also protect her against the deliberate arts of the seducer. He was however determined to possess her; and he was not long in forming the necessary plans to achieve his detestable aim. Unfortunately he had ample means at his disposal for this purpose; and he lost no time in putting them into execution. The abbess lent herself to his designs; and, as soon as she had been induced to take her vows formally as a nun, Gloria was removed from the convent to the White Mansion near Prague. This incident occurred when she was within a few months of her seventeenth year; and her tranference from the religious establishment in the southern province to the splendid abode of the Baroness Hamelen near the capital, was kept secret from her uncle. In fact, it was represented to Zitzka, who at this period held the high appointment of Lord Chamberlain to King Wenzel, that his niece had commenced her probationary year after taking the veil, and that she was therefore precluded from receiving any visitors.

On being first introduced to the White Mansion, Gloria was unfeignedly rejoiced at having exchanged the hateful monotony of a convent for the luxury of such a palatial residence, and the pleasing society of so agreeable a woman as the baroness. She was not immediately initiated into the secrets of the mansion; but the vile, profligate, and hypocritical baroness began insidiously to pour the poison of demoralizing ideas and thoughts into the young maiden's mind.

This iniquitous proceeding was carried on with so much art, tact, and caution, that Gloria was lulled into the belief that she was receiving the most exemplary moral lessons, while in reality she was undergoing the process of a deep contamination. For while the baroness affected to be warning her against the errors and faults into which inexperienced maidens were apt to fall in their entry upon life, she drew the most voluptuous and exciting pictures of the very temptation which she affected to hold up for avoidance. The warm and naturally ardent temperament of Gloria was inflamed; unknown feelings sprang up in her soul, new thoughts settled themselves in her mind, and her imagination was skilfully led on to heighten of its own accord the glowing colors wherein her vile preceptress, with devilish art, had depicted all kinds of sensuous enjoyments. At length the baroness fancied her to be ripe for initiation into the mysteries and real character of her splendid dwelling; and accordingly, one night when the silver bell tinkled at the usual hour, she led her into the splendid room where all the company were assembled.

Gloria was enchanted, and her satisfaction knew no limits when she found herself caressed by the charming ladies and courted by the handsome gallants constituting that society. But ere the veil was completely torn aside, and while she was yet dazzled with the gorgeous spectacle afforded by the saloon, and the treatment she received from its occupants, the baroness conducted her into a small chamber adjoining, and where a rude iron lamp was burning. Oh! what a glacial sensation of horror struck to the heart of the affrighted maiden, when she beheld the hideous features

of that room, which contrasted so appallingly with the magnificent apartment and the brilliant company she had just left! The blood froze in her veins, and her golden hair felt as if it were bristling upon her head, while, recoiling in dread terror, she staggered against the wall of that accursed chamber.—And well might she be thus overwhelmed with so dire a consternation; for before her stood two ghastly skeletons in coffins placed upright, and with their long, thin, fleshless arms stretched out and their whitened fingers pointing towards her.

Recovering somewhat from the awful shock thus abruptly experienced, Gloria turned her shuddering looks upon the baroness; but, with a countenance that had clothed itself in frowns, and with eyes that flashed forth lightnings, so as to complete the horror of the scene, Lady Hamelen presented a dagger to the maiden's bosom, and bade her repeat the oath which she was about to dictate—or prepare to perish upon the spot, and become another skeleton to occupy another coffin in that dreadful place! Wild with affright, Gloria sank upon her knees, and took the awful oath dictated by the fiendish woman.—We cannot sully our pages by recording the particulars of that tremendous oath; suffice it to say that it pledged her, in terms that invoked the testimony of all the powers of heaven and hell, to the profoundest secrecy with regard to those mysterious revels with which she was about to be initiated. But this oath was only made binding so long as the Baroness Hamelen remained in existence—a condition which showed how little the depraved woman recked for the infamy wherewith exposure would cover her name after her death.

Having taken the oath, every word of which fell from her lips like a fresh crime striking, blow upon blow, on her inmost soul, the miserable maiden was compelled to kiss the dagger proffered to her for the purpose; and the baroness then led her into a little ante-chamber where refreshments were spread upon the table. There the infamous woman filled a goblet with wine and proffered it to Gloria; and the maiden, sinking with the exhaustion consequent upon the overwhelming nature of the ordeal through which she had just passed, greedily swallowed the gold-colored fluid that bubbled on the brim of the cup.—Like nectar did it pour down her throat—and, the next moment, like lightning did it seem to circulate through her entire system. The vermil tinge, which terror had frightened away, returned to her damask cheeks; her lips, just before so pale and quivering, resumed all their scarlet brightness and wreathing smiles; her eyes—those glorious eyes—shone once again in all their supernal lustre; and her whole countenance became radiant with a joyous animation. The incidents of the skeleton-chamber and the fearful oath scarcely dwelt any longer in her memory, and then only with the impression which a horrible dream, and not a tremendous reality, was likely to have left; and it was therefore with beaming features and agile step that the heavenly creature accompanied the baroness back into the gorgeous saloon.

And now we will pause for a brief space to afford the reader a still more accurate idea than any he can have yet formed relative to the true character of the White Mansion.

The Baroness Hamelen was, as we have already shown in the earlier chapters of our narrative, one of the most influential members and zealous supporters of the secret association of the Bronze Statue. It has also been stated that one leading principle in the plan of procedure adopted by that infamous society was to obtain the adhesion of powerful nobles and wealthy land-owners by means of the insinuating witchery and guileful fascinations of those women who, having been purposely thrown in their way to attract them, succeeded in winning their affections and becoming their wives. In order, therefore, that the tribunal might render its female votaries as completely its slaves as possible, the hideous method of destroying their virtue was adopted by the leaders of the secret society; and when the pure springs of their morality were thoroughly infected—when all sense of real shame was destroyed in their breasts—and when a proficiency in the arts of deceit and hypocrisy was rendered a matter of necessity in order to conceal their own unchastity—*then* were they considered to be fitting agents to carry out the atrocious purposes of the Bronze Statue.

To accomplish this wholesale work of demoralization in secrecy, security and safety, several establishments, ostensibly philanthropic, were instituted in various districts of Bohemia; and the last as well as the most magnificent of these palatial pandemonia was that

over which the Baroness Hamelen presided. On the death of her husband did she commence the foundation of the establishment by building the White Mansion at a short distance from the castle which bore her name; and when the former edifice was completed and the necessary improvements were made in the latter, she dismissed all the workmen with the exception of the three brothers Schwartz. These men she secretly employed to extend a long subterranean passage which already existed under Hamelen Castle, and carry it as far as the basis of the White Mansion, with which a means of communication was thus formed. But no sooner had the brothers Schwartz accomplished their task, when the baroness resolved that they should not go forth into the world again and have an opportunity of stating to their friends and acquaintances the nature of the work upon which they had been engaged. She accordingly handed them over to the tender mercies of the servitors of the Bronze Statue; and, as the reader has already seen, they only escaped a hideous death by consenting to become the executioners of the diabolical tribunal. Yet at last, as if heaven's own retributive justice were to be carried out, the baroness was herself consigned by *their* hands to the fearful doom of the Virgin's Kiss!

No sooner were the arrangements duly made in the White Mansion and Hamelen Castle for the reception of a large number of guests, when, under the guise of the purest philanthropy, the widowed and orphaned of the female sex were admitted into the former, and the friendless of the other sex were installed into the latter. Father Cyprian became the president of the castle, while the baroness was the leading star of the mansion. The work of contamination soon began: the subterranean passage afforded a constant means of communication between the two buildings; and in a short space there was not a male occupant of the castle nor a female inmate of the Mansion who did not plunge with frenetic delight into the vortex of dissipation, profligacy and sensual enjoyment, which thus opened gradually at the feet of all who entered those palatial pandemonia!

The silver bell sounded at midnight the signal for the commencement of the mingled revel and debauchery in the grand saloon. The Eleusynian Mysteries—the ancient orgies of the priests in Herculaneum and Pompeii—the voluptuous pleasures pursued in the gardens of the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan—none of all those detestable rites or profligate proceedings could equal the utter demoralization which reigned dominant in the gilded saloon of the White Mansion. There were all the ladies wont to assemble first; and thither repaired, in procession through the subterranean passages, the male occupants of Hamelen Castle. Then, when the company were excited by the sparkling wines imported from France and the Rhine—when soft and voluptuous music added its charm to the scene—and when a complete sense of security against all intrusion became an inducement to throw off all reserve and bid farewell to all modesty—then did the revel develop itself in its most licentious phases. Bacchus and Venus were at once declared the deities of the scene: all delicacy was lost sight of—all shame was banished, and the orgie went into extremes which defy description. Casting off their apparel save with respect to the lightest vesture, the votaries of that revel abandoned themselves in their more than semi-nudity to the frenetic whirl of the dance; then some, with a classic taste worthy of a better exercise, represented the attitudes of the most famous statues of antiquity and the most celebrated deities of the Olympian myth. In a word, licentiousness reigned with an unblushing audacity; and the very extremes of demoralization appeared to borrow a charm and a refinement from the splendor of the saloon, the brilliancy of the lights, the warmth of the perfumed atmosphere, the exquisite nature of the refreshments, and the beauty of the women constituting the heroines of these unparalleled proceedings.

And in order that the nightly revels should sustain as keen an appetite for pleasure as it was possible thus to provoke on the part of the partakers therein, a variety was sought for by means of introducing strangers from the great world without. Thus was it usual for such infamous agents as Dame Martha to be frequently on the watch in Prague, to insinuate herself into the notice of any handsome gallants whom she might happen to meet, and thereby entice them to the White Mansion, as in the case of Lionel and Konrad. Then, having passed through the ordeal of that tremendous oath to which we have already alluded, the strangers thus intro-

duced shared in all the voluptuous revelry of the scene; and the utmost precautions were adopted to prevent them from discovering the whereabouts of that palace of pleasure. Should it subsequently happen that the Baroness Hamelen was recognised, in Prague or elsewhere, by any individual who had been one of the select few thus stealthily introduced into the White Mansion, she would assume a look of the most perfect astonishment and with a haughty coldness declare that the person must be mistaken, for that she had never seen him before. This conduct on her part was invariably crowned with success; and the individual, overwhelmed with confusion at the *error* which he could not doubt having committed, was sure to apologise and pass on his way.

It sometimes occurred that marriages resulted from the intimacy subsisting between the inmates of the White Mansion and those of Hamelen Castle; but these arose from the necessity of those cases in which the fallen females were likely to become mothers. Then hasty alliances were formed, handsome dowers were forthcoming from the treasury of the secret association,—and the couples thus 'made honest,' quitted their abodes in the Mansion and Castle and settled wherever they might prove most useful to the interests of the Bronze Statue.

As a general rule the inmates of the two establishments were kept prisoners within the walls thereof until they were disposed of according to the will and pleasure of the authorities of the Bronze Statue. The women, when thoroughly saturated with the roseate floods of demoralizing pleasures, were sent forth into the world, to catch husbands amongst the aristocracy, or else introduced into nunneries: and the men were placed as preceptors in families where it was deemed advisable to sow the seeds that might germinate into a harvest for the secret society to reap. The servants in both the establishments were likewise prisoners; and although they were well acquainted with the nature of the revels practised nightly in the saloon of the Mansion, yet few of them were members of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue. Thus was it that Ermach, the youthful page whom Gloria assassinated, was unable, when questioned by Sir Ernest de Colmar,—or rather the mighty Albert in the disguise of a knight,—to give him any explanation relative to the manner in which Lionel and Konrad had disappeared so mysteriously. For we must request the reader to understand that the personal dependants of Lady Hamelen and the sworn servitors of the Bronze Statue, a number of whom dwelt in her castle, were perfectly distinct the one party from the other.

To resume the thread of our narrative, we must return to Gloria, whom we left just at the moment when the Baroness Hamelen conducted her back again into the gorgeous saloon. The revelry had not then reached the point calculated to open her eyes thoroughly to the true character of the establishment and its inmates; but it had already made a commencement sufficient to excite her surprise. In a few moments Father Cyprian was by her side,—but no longer the Father Cyprian whom she had previously been accustomed to regard as a disinterested friend and a model of sanctity! It was the same individual, certainly, and yet how altered, how different, how changed! The coarse ecclesiastical gown, the girdle of cordage, the rosary, the knotted scourge, the hard sandals—all these were laid aside; and the priest appeared in the costume of an elegant gallant, with a slashed doublet, the finest linen, the lightest shoes, and a plumed cap.

His fine form and handsome countenance were thus set off to the utmost advantage; and for a few minutes Gloria was as much rejoiced as astonished at the change which rendered him a far more agreeable-looking companion than when apparelled in his Carthusian vesture.

Despite, however, of the exhilarating quality of the drugged wine which the Baroness Hamelen had given her in the ante-chamber,—despite of all the influence which that bad woman's covert licentiousness of discourse had produced upon the maiden's mind, she recoiled from the looks of burning desire which the priest fixed upon her, and she withdrew abruptly the hand which he endeavored to convey to his lips. She commanded the insolent priest to retire from her presence. It was then that Father Cyprian revealed to her the fact that she was an inmate of an establishment belonging to the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue; and no sooner did this tremendous announcement burst upon the ears of the unhappy Gloria, when she sank down senseless upon the floor of the saloon,

—yes, sank down suddenly and deprived of consciousness, as if beneath the weight of a death blow. Immediate advantage was taken of this swoon to administer an opiate which should retain the fated girl in that deep lethargy for several hours; and when she awoke in the morning, she found herself in her own chamber, but with the Carthusian by her side, and her ruin had been accomplished!

But over this portion of our narrative we must pass as hurriedly as possible. Suffice it to say that Gloria was not a being to give way to the wildness of grief, when a sentiment of bitter vengeance was to be cherished; nor was she blind to the danger of becoming a victim to the Bronze Statue, instead of a mere votary, unless she veiled her maddened feelings beneath a dense hypocrisy. She, therefore, affected to abandon herself to that vortex of illicit pleasure into which she been plunged by her treacherous admirer; and the Carthusian was soon lulled into the belief that his charming mistress was not only contented with her lot, but that she even entertained a passionate affection for himself. The result was that she gained a complete ascendancy over the ecclesiastic; and thus she found an opportunity of making her escape in the course of a few weeks.

To her uncle, John Zitzka did Gloria Ildegardo now hasten; and throwing herself into his arms, she revealed enough to make him comprehend that her ruin had been effected by a treacherous villain, whose diabolical nature concealed itself beneath the garb of a priest. It were impossible to describe the mingled anguish and indignation which Zitzka experienced on receiving this avowal from the lips or his weeping niece. He swore to avenge her; and then she recollected the appalling oath which she had taken at the White Mansion, and which she dared not violate. Nevertheless, Zitzka naturally pressed for the fullest explanations, so that he might ascertain *whom* he was to strike, and *where* the blow was to be struck, in order to avenge the colossal outrage offered to his niece. Gloria now repented of her precipitation in confiding her wrongs to her uncle, for she had therefore placed herself in a most perplexing dilemma. She dared not point to the White Mansion as the place whither she had been taken, and where her ruin had been consummated —because her oath was too dreadfully binding to violate, even under circumstances so flagitious as those which we have been detailing; and she dared not say that the wrong had been inflicted at the convent where Zitzka had originally placed her, because the first inquiry which he might institute would elicit the fact that she had been absent for some weeks from that neighborhood altogether. What course, then, was she to adopt? The schooling she had received beneath the roof of the Baroness Hamelen had already rendered her no mean adept in the arts of duplicity: and she accordingly invented a tale which obtained full credence on the part of her uncle. She said that, goaded to desperation by the monotony of a conventual life, she had escaped from that sanctuary,—that while journeying to Prague she had encountered a priest, who, seeing that she was friendless, offered her the sacred shield of his protection; and that he had infamously abused the trust which she had so naturally, so readily, and so gratefully reposed in him. She likewise informed her uncle that the villainous ecclesiastic had previously insinuated himself into her confidence and had dexterously drawn from her all the details of her own and her parents' history; and that, when he had thus gleaned the startling fact that the fugitive nun Marietta was identical with Gloria Ildegardo, he threw off the mask, proclaimed himself a votary of the Bronze Statue, and overwhelmed her with that consternation, which, by depriving her of consciousness, left her an easy prey to his infamous designs.

'Enough! enough!' exclaimed John Zitzka. 'And now war to the priesthood—war, war in favor of the people! But in the meantime, Gloria,' he continued, 'it will be prudent for you to retire where I placed you at the period of your lamented mother's death.—There you will find the same two charming girls with whom you formed so deep a friendship, and you will be happy in their society. What! do your looks become gloomy, Gloria?'

'No, dearest uncle,' replied the weeping Gloria; 'I am not downcast upon that account, but I tremble to lose your protection. Oh! believe me, I am now as much in danger of being seized upon by the agents of the Church as by the servitors of the Bronze Statue.'

'Gloria,' responded Zitzka, after a few minutes of profound thought, 're-

tire thou from the world, and await the issue of the struggle now at hand.—Above all things, keep thine own counsel, and put no more trust in priests and father-confessors. Let all the incidents of the past be treasured up in thine own bosom, like sad and sacred relics, which it would be profane to display to the view of even intimate friends. And now embrace me, Gloria, and away to rejoin Linda and Beatrice.'

The niece took leave of her uncle; and in a deep disguise she quitted Prague. That very same day the great reformer-hero raised the banner of Mount Tabor.

Time passed on; and in the seclusion to which Gloria retired, she learned from a wandering gipsy the properties of a particular berry which grows in the great Bohemian forests. A decoction of that vegetable production would impart a beautiful, clear, and transparent olive tint to the skin, and which the closest observer could not possibly discover to be an artificial hue. The ordinary process of ablution would cleanse the skin thus colored, but not impair the tint, much less wash it away altogether. Scalding tears might stream from the eyes adown the cheeks, and yet not the slightest effect would they produce upon the coloring, delicate though it were. Two fluids alone would remove its otherwise indelible stain: one was a strong decoction of the root of the shrub which bore the berry itself, and the other was the warm blood of either human being or dumb animal. Experiments proved the truth of the gipsy's information; and Gloria at once adopted the discovery as the means of enjoying her liberty without fear of either the Bronze Statue or the Church. But in order to render her disguise still more secure by auxiliary defences, she surrounded herself with all the romantic mysticism which a strange garb and a wild name were calculated to conjure up; and as the Daughter of Satan, believed to have sprung from a line of princes in the far-off orient, and with all the marvellous beauty of her person enhanced by an apparel charmingly picturesque, there was little for her to apprehend on the part of her enemies.

In the meantime her uncle had made the Taborite banner an object of respect and exultation amongst the millions, and of dread to the aristocratic few.—Father Cyprian, by becoming temporarily connected with a Carthusian monastery at Prague, found means to gain access to King Wenzel, who left him guardian of his daughter Elizabetha and trustee of her immense treasures. The miscreant ecclesiastic, under pretence of placing the orphan princess in a secure asylum, conveyed her secretly to the White Mansion; and there the same episode in which we have chronicled the ruin of Gloria, became likewise a chapter in the history of the injured and outraged Elizabetha of Bohemia.

No wonder, then, that the villanous priest exercised over this unfortunate lady that influence which so much surprised Albert of Austria, when he visited her under the guise of Sir Ernest de Colmar; no wonder that the slightest allusion to the silver bell which tinkled at midnight, should make her quiver with mingled horror, shame, and despair, as the damning words reminded her of her deep degradation!

But to return to Gloria. No sooner had she superseded the style and aspect of a Daughter of Glory by the name and appearance of a Daughter of Satan, than she hastened to join her uncle at his encampment, which was then in the vicinage of Prague. The relationship to the great Taborite chief was of course kept a profound secret; and the rumor which obtained circulation, to the effect that the beautiful stranger was a being surrounded by a romantic mysticism, and invested with even a magical influence peculiarly her own, was well calculated to work upon the fervid imaginations of the religious reformers. Her presence was accepted as an omen of triumph; she obtained the love, respect and veneration of the Taborites.

The reader will easily comprehend that in the times of which we are writing the anathemas of the church exercised an amazing influence over the minds of individuals, especially upon women. In the same manner all pledges made at the altar, whether vows of marriage or of celibacy, were likewise too awful to break without experiencing a deep compunction consequent on such violation.

It was in this state of mind with regard to the past, and in her anxiety to obtain a complete spiritual emancipation for the future,—as well as for the purpose of destroying at least one source of peril, should her identity as Gloria, or rather Marietta the Nun, be discovered,—that she despatched Linda to the abbess of the convent to sound her as to the purchase of a release from those vows which had been violated. For it

never struck Gloria that the abbess was a party to the villany of Father Cyprian in bearing her away to a den of infamy, much less did it occur to her that the abbess was a votary of the Bronze Statue. She looked upon that lady-superior as one of the Carthusian's dupes; and under this impression did she send to open the above-mentioned negotiation with her.

Linda experienced a most cordial reception at the hands of the abbess who cheerfully consented to the proposal of which the young maiden was the bearer. A sum of money was agreed upon as the oblatory ransom to be paid by Gloria; and the abbess undertook to procure a private Bull from the pope, authorising her to grant the required dispensation. Linda returned to her mistress with these tidings, and Zitzka was with some difficulty persuaded by his niece to permit the carrying out of a negotiation which had been entered upon unknown to him. But at last he consented, and the Taborite army accordingly moved into the vicinage of the convent. Then, without being allowed the slightest reason to suspect that Satanais was in reality Marietta the Nun, the abbess was informed that Gloria was temporarily staying in the Taborite encampment; and all the arrangements were made for the ceremony of dispensation, Linda being the negotiatrix between the parties. The Captain General bound himself by a solemn vow to guarantee the personal safety of the abbess and all those who might accompany her; and as the ceremony was to take place within the Taborite lines, the watchword was made known to the abbess for that special occasion, so that every person connected with her conventual establishment, or whose presence she required at the church in the wood, might experience no difficulty in obtaining admission. We need hardly say that these arrangements were no sooner made, and the particular evening for the ceremony agreed upon, than full details were secretly forwarded by the abbess to Father Cyprian, who was at the time residing at his grotto in the southern district, consequently at no great distance from the Taborite encampment.

—

CHAPTER CV.

CONCLUSION OF THE EXPLANATIONS OF THE PAST.

It happened that on the evening fixed for the ceremony, Albert of Austria, who was visiting Bohemia under the name of Sir Ernest de Colmar, stopped at the Taborite station on his way to Prague. Zitzka, who had fought in the Turkish wars, and who had seen the Austrian Sovereign more than once, instantaneously recognised him; but, affecting not to know him, he received him with the courtesy suitable to his alleged rank. At the same time Zitzka resolved in his own breast to turn the incognito visit of the ducal Albert to the ultimate advantage of the Taborite interests; and this design appeared to grow more feasible when he saw how profound was the impression which the marvellous beauty and the well-assumed mysticism of his niece—then styling herself Satanais—had immediately produced upon the Austrian. As for Gloria herself, she was so struck by the noble demeanor, handsome person, and engaging manners of the visitor, that even before they separated that evening she had conceived a violent passion for him: and as her wild nature was made up of ardor and impulse, she allowed her imagination and her feelings to pursue their thrilling and exciting career, unchecked by her will and unregulated by her reason.

The hour for the ceremony of dispensation arrived; and then ensued that scene in the church which must be fresh in the recollection of our readers. The Austrian prince was led by circumstances to become a witness of that proceeding; and Father Cyprian, aided by his knowledge of the watchword, had passed the Taborite lines and penetrated into the sacred edifice. His design was to carry off Gloria; and as a matter of course the abbess was his accomplice in the plot. Fain would he have brought with him a dozen sworn servitors of the Tribunal of the Bronze Statue to bear away the mighty Zitzka also; but he knew that the circumstance of too many individuals passing the sentinels at the outposts by means of the watchword, would excite suspicion and place himself and his accomplices in jeopardy. His project was, therefore, confined to the abduction of Gloria; and it was pre-arranged that the two priests at the altar should pre-

vent Zitzka from affording any succor to his niece. Accordingly, when the lights were suddenly extinguished, those two priests enacted the part of bravos and struck down the Captain-General, while Father Cyprian seized upon Gloria. But the Austrian hero was at hand to rescue her; and the remainder of the occurrences of that memorable night are well known to our reader. Suffice it to observe, in addition, that Father Cyprian fled from the scene of his defeat and disappointment and made the best of his way to Prague, —and Zitzka forbore from the adoption of any means to punish the treacherous abbess and her nuns, because he was unwilling to take the slightest step that stood a chance of giving publicity to aught respecting the past history of Gloria. The incident, however, served to convince his niece that she was wrong in the favorable estimate she had formed of the character of the abbess and her nuns; and she now saw, while shuddering at the risk she had incurred, that those treacherous recluses were not the dupes, but the accomplices, of her Carthusian ravisher.

Through motives of a generous friendship towards a brave, chivalrous, and enlightened prince, did Zitzka present the Austrian with the talismanic ring, which was known to every Taborite, and which was a signet that all were bound to obey, no matter under what circumstances such obedience might be exacted or who might be the wearer of the jewel. It was, therefore, to serve as a personal safe-guard, passport, and protection, that the Captain General bestowed it upon the Austrian.

Intoxicated with the enthusiasm of that passion, which she had conceived for the handsome traveller, the secret of whose rank she had of course learned from her uncle, the heroine of this eventful history gave him a double appointment at Prague. In the one instance, it was as *Gloria* that she was to meet him: in the other as *Satanais*. Her object was to ascertain under which character she could make the most profound and permanent impression upon his heart; for, with a woman's natural keenness, she had not failed to observe, that alike as the Daughter of Satan and the Daughter of Glory, her wondrous beauty had enlisted the tenderest interests of him whom she already loved madly and devotedly.

And then began a system of duplicity and artfulness, mingled with demonstrations of the sincerest affection—guile and delusion mixed up with unfeigned passion—deception and trickery intertwining with feelings of devotion the most real and the most profound. First it was as the Daughter of Glory that the romantic being met the Austrian prince on the southern rampart of Prague; and when she saw that he was so dazzled, bewildered, and overwhelmed by her transcendant loveliness as to leave no doubt in her mind that the conquest was achieved beyond all possibility of reaction on his part, she sped away precipitately, so that he might remain under the influence of those impressions wherewith her meteor-like presence had inspired him.

It was then that the one grand failing in Zitzka's character developed itself more completely than it ever had done before. We allude to his readiness to descend to intrigue, tortuous plot, or petty chicanery, in order to accomplish a great aim; and it was from this weak point in his otherwise noble, lofty, and chivalrous nature, that a curious scheme was initiated for rendering Austria powerless in respect to Bohemia. The fact was that of all the surrounding countries, Austria was alone to be dreaded by the Taborites; and an intervention on her part would have proved the most perilous blow that could be struck at the cause of the Republican Reformers. For though only a Duchy, Austria was great and powerful, and Albert was one of the mightiest warriors of the age. It therefore became desirable to hold Austria at bay or muzzle her altogether, if possible; and to this latter aim did Zitzka direct his attention.

He might have taken Albert prisoner and kept him as a hostage for the maintainance of a good understanding on the part of Austria; but, as the two countries were then at peace, such an outrage would have been a flagrant violation of all the laws of justice, right, and hospitality. The Captain-General therefore resolved to make use of the influence which he perceived his niece had already acquired over Albert; while his affection for her naturally prompted the hope that she might become his bride. Gloria was as much surprised as rejoiced when she found her uncle taking an interest in the progress of her adventures with the prince, and still more astonished and delighted was she when Zitzka said to her—'I

have thought of a project which will place his Highness entirely within my power, and compel him to submit to any conditions that I may choose to impose either on *your* behalf, or on *mine own*.'

'Explain yourself, dear uncle—explain yourself!' cried Gloria; 'for I do not hesitate to avow that I love this handsome Austrian better than life!'

'Listen, niece—listen,' said Zitzka. 'On that evening when the Duke first appeared amongst us, at the encampment in the wood afar off, I failed not to notice that the romantic mystery of your language produced upon him an impression as deep as that made by the beauty of your person. Especially was he struck by the wildly strange and singularly startling appellation of *Daughter of Satan* which you have assumed. It is, therefore, now for you to avail yourself of the superstitious hold which you have thus taken upon his mind, and you will experience but little difficulty in leading him into such a position whence he can only extricate himself on *our* terms.

'I comprehend you,' said Gloria; and after a short discussion the whole plan of action was arranged.

That same evening the beauteous creature, under her assumed name of Satanais, repaired to the palace gardens in Prague; and there, with an admirably artistic commingling of pathos and terror, romance and mystery, real tenderness and affected excitement, she so worked upon the mind of Albert that it became completely ductile, pliant, and plastic to model to her own purposes. The effect of the melodrama was heightened and its success triumphantly crowned by the unseen aid afforded by Zitzka; who, from his concealment amongst the shrubs, proclaimed that solemn warning which told *the Daughter of Satan that her hour was near at hand!*

The next act in the drama was the second meeting, about eight days later, between Albert of Austria and the self-styled Satanais, in the palace gardens. On that occasion she related the history which was so ingenious a paraphrase of the real narrative of the misfortunes of the house of Ildegardo; and with so perfect a veri-similitude of artless sincerity did she recite her well-studied tale, that the princely listener was utterly thrown off his guard, and completely absorbed in the superstition, the enchantment, and the wilderment attendant on such a history, flowing from such a tongue! For so exquisite was the tact of the syren, that she enthralled alike the mind and the sense; she compelled her hearer to identify himself with her imaginary interests; she gradually drew him more and more into the meshes of the web which she was so artfully weaving around him. Nothing was real save the look of love which she so often threw upon him; nothing was genuine save the occasional interval of tenderness, when, carried away by the ardor of her passion, she would have yielded herself up to him, had he been the man to take advantage of her, or had she not recovered sufficient presence of mind to tear herself away from his arms.

While appearing as Satanais, she sought and demanded only his friendship; it was as Gloria that she wished to win and secure his love. Buoying herself up with the hope of becoming his wife, she did not wish to be compelled to remain with a dark-tinted complexion for the rest of her existence.—She preferred her natural beauty, with its golden hair and skin of milk and roses, to those sable tresses and that olive tint, the falsity of which an accident might some day reveal. Therefore was she anxious to be beloved as Gloria, and not as Satanais.

But in this ardent longing she was disappointed. It was as the Daughter of Satan that she made the impression upon Albert's mind, and not as the Daughter of Glory. As the Daughter of Satan she easily obtained from him a vow to become her champion in the mysterious duel which the wild inventions of her narrative had depicted as necessary; and on the following day, in an interview with the syren as the Daughter of Glory, he confessed to her that he loved Satanais! Vainly had Gloria brought the mysticism of romance to bear upon his mind once more; vainly had she poured into his ears all the deep pathos of her pretended dream in the convent—that dream of which he himself was the foreshadowed hero! The influence which she had hoped thus to exercise, proved ineffectual and pointless; and though she could not succeed in being loved as Gloria, she nevertheless had the consolation of being loved as Satanais!

Next came the episode of the midnight battle upon the heath; and we need hardly say that the sable warrior whom Albert encountered on the occasion, was none other than John Zitzka himself.

The terms which he imposed were alike suitable to his own interests and to the views of his niece. The first condition enjoined a speedy departure from Prague, and the fourth an abstinence from all interference in Bohemian affairs for the period of one year. By these two clauses, the Captain-General's own purposes were fully gained: the prince would have to return to his own dominions, and leave him unmolested to consolidate the Taborite system in Bohemia. On the other hand, the second and third conditions, enjoining Albert to see *Satanais* no more, and to escort *Gloria* to Vienna, were imposed at the instigation of the syren herself. She still hoped that he would learn to love her in her true personal character, as well as in her assumed one; and if not, it would then be easy to convert herself once more from the Child of Glory to the Child of Satan.

Disguised—she hoped for the last time—*as Satanais*, she visited Albert in his chamber at the Golden Falcon. Her object was to ensure an interview with him for the last day, *as Gloria*. On the river's bank they accordingly met; and this was the occasion when Gloria's poinard drank Dame Martha's heart blood. She saw, she knew, she felt that the untoward incident must have shocked his soul somewhat in respect to her; but as he believed that she committed the deed in self-defence, she did not despair of still winning unto herself as the Daughter of Glory that love which she possessed as the Daughter of Satan. Nor when, on meeting at the southern gate to commence their journey towards Vienna, she perceived that Albert was merely courteous and friendly, but very far from affectionate, not did she even then despair!

The reader may easily comprehend her mingled horror and alarm when, as they passed by the White Mansion, she learnt from his own lips that he had been a visitor there; but she was speedily reassured on perceiving that he entertained not the slightest suspicion that she herself was ever an inmate of that place. Scarcely, however, was she relieved from the source of apprehension, when another presented itself to her view in the person of Ermach. This page,—a precocious youth whose naturally ardent temperament had been inflamed to a Vesuvian heat by a knowledge of the proceedings in the grand saloon at the White Mansion, had cast the eyes of burning desire upon Gloria when she was a resident there.

Although he was at that period little more than fifteen years of age, yet had his passions expanded into a fervor which was consuming him; and, throwing himself at Gloria's feet, he implored her to accept the tribute of his devotion. But she rejected his suit,—and soon afterwards she escaped from the mansion. The place then became distasteful to Ermach; and it soon grew loathsome to his feelings. He cherished sentiments of mingled love and vengeance with regard to Gloria; and he longed to free himself from the thraldom of a compulsory servitude in the Baroness Hamelen's establishment.

Two years elapsed without affording him this opportunity; but at length the visit of Albert to the White Mansion became the means of his emancipation. And then he and Gloria met once more in the manner already related!

But this meeting was followed by an awful tragedy. The infatuated Gloria Ildegardo, though far from being naturally depraved, was nevertheless prepared to perpetrate any crime in order to remove an impediment to the consummation of her dearest, brighest, fondest hopes. Her love for the Austrian prince was a delirium, a madness,—it would have converted her into a fiend as easily as it was capable of subduing her into the gentleness of a lamb. Ermach threatened her with exposure,—ahd she murdered him! But, oh! what pen can describe her feelings when accident so ordained that Albert himself, the object of her fervent adoration, should become the witness of that *second* deed of blood? She now knew that all her hopes of winning his love as *Gloria* were prostrated, never to rise again; but she implored him not to suffer his abhorrence of herself to redound upon *Satanais*. To the landlord and landlady of the inn she boldly and promptly avowed the crime; for she was fearful lest suspicion might attach itself to Albert, should she have remained silent on that head. But while thus proclaiming herself to be the murderess, she knew full well that she could escape from the custody in which she was sure to be placed, for when locked in the chamber with her two handmaidens, a small quantity of the vegetable decoction which she always had at hand, speedily converted her into *the dark-complexioned Satanais*.—

Thus the Taborite sentinels were juggled; and the murderess escaped.

At night she re-appeared to him whom she loved; but now it was as the Daughter of Satan once again! All hope of being beloved *as Gloria* was annihilated; and therefore she must content herself with rivetting his affections and becoming his bride, at the sacrifice of remaining a dark-skinned houri for the rest of her life. The presence of that unknown warrior in the bright armor, who kept his vizor constantly closed, and around whom there appeared to hang a certain degree of mystery, was irksome to the intriguing lady; and once more assuming the character of Gloria for the nonce, she repaired to that unknown's chamber at the inn, in the hope of inducing him by some means or another to consent to quit the party on the morrow, and pursue his journey alone. But what was Gloria's surprise when, on stealing into that room, she discovered the unknown to be a woman? At first it struck her that she must have entered the wrong chamber; but the presence of the polished armor convinced her that she had made no mistake, and a second glance at the fair sleeper showed her the charming and never to be forgotten countenance of Angela!

The persuasion and reasoning by which Gloria accomplished her purpose in separating the forest maiden from Albert's party, are well known to the reader. Everything now seemed propitious to the mingled love and ambition of the daughter of the ruined house of Ildegardo; soon, oh! soon would the Bohemian frontier be passed, and Austria would be entered—that Austria over which she hoped to reign! But, alas! her castle-building upon the enchanted ground of the future was destined to a speedy and signal annihilation. While pursuing the journey towards the Austrian boundary, the travellers reached a point where the high road branched off into two paths, the one leading by the stronghold of Altendorf, and the other by the blackened ruins of Ildegardo. A natural sentiment of horror prompted Gloria to avoid the vicinage of the former castle, which she knew to be the secret seat of the terrors of the Bronze Statue; and an undefinable feeling urged her on the other hand to visit the dilapidated remains of the home of her birth and of her infant years.

But when standing on the summit of the ruined donjon, she contemplated those scenes, every feature of which was fraught with some melancholy memorial or some sad family association, indescribable feelings came over her, melting all that was strong, or daring, or rugged in her nature. Then, as her companion began to speak of the ruins of the other two castles which he beheld in the distance. a kind of panic seized upon her—a presentiment of evil fastening upon her mind, and urging her to flee thence with all possible speed! But the appearance of Bernard suddenly became a new source of alarm; and while he and Albert were exchanging the initiative conversational remarks which took place upon the occasion, Gloria was gazing with mingled intentness and alarm upon the countenance of the venerable old man.

Every moment did those lineaments become more and more familiar to her recollection; and although she was only six years of age when the ruin of her family's fortunes took place and she became a captive along with her mother in Manfredo Castle, yet had the countenance of the old man remained sufficiently impressed upon her memory to convince her now that it was one which she had seen before. She asked him impatiently who he was; and his answer confirmed in an instant the suspicion that had already sprung up in her mind. Her anxiety to depart thereupon became so acutely painful unto herself as it was strange and bewildering to Albert; and then followed the storm of incidents which, commencing with the attack made by the Carthusian's party, proceeded with the narration of Bernard's history, and led to the unveiling of the dark-skinned houri's duplicity. Then came the crowning event of her arrest by order of her own uncle, for when Zitzka had received the tidings that she was a murderess, his soul revolted from the idea of permitting the generous-hearted and confiding Albert to make her his bride.

In obedience to the commands of the Captain General, Gloria Ildegardo was conveyed to a remote part of Bohemia, and placed in the strictest seclusion. Her handmaidens were still permitted to accompany her; and after the expiration of a few weeks, she succeeded in effecting her escape. Her singular character now exhibited a new phase in a violent hatred which she had conceived towards her uncle for having practised coercive measures with regard to her; and she was resolved to be avenged. Proceeding towards Al-

tendorf Castle, which was then beleaguered by the Taborite army, she left her handmaidens at a cottage in the neighborhood of the stronghold, and penetrated at dusk within the precincts of the military lines. The last grand battle had taken place that day,—and the evening of Gloria's visit to the encampment was the same on which Angela and Zitzka met under the circumstances already detailed in their proper place. The vindictive Gloria had made up her mind to assassinate her uncle; and she lay concealed in the vicinage of his pavilion to watch the opportunity. Presently the Captain General and a female came forth together; they passed close by the spot where Gloria was hidden in ambush; and she was about to spring like a tigress upon her uncle, when certain words which passed between him and his companion suddenly paralysed her with amazement. For that rapid interchange of remarks not only revealed to her the fact that this female companion of her uncle was Angela Wildon, but likewise that she was his own daughter!

Then did a hideous feeling of envy and jealousy spring up in the mind of Gloria: for she suspected that Angela had loved Albert of Austria, and she saw that the circumstance of being recognized as Zitzka's child would perhaps facilitate the path to their eventual union. The diabolical thought therefore entered into her mind that she would make Angela the victim of her poignard, instead of her uncle—and thereby wreak a terrible revenge upon the latter at the same time that she punished a hated rival. Into the subterraneans of Altendorf Castle did she follow them: but heaven saved her from the perpetration of the dark deed which she contemplated, and made her the instrument of its own retributive justice. For after wandering for some time in the dark amidst the tombs and through the awful underground regions of the castle, Gloria reached the hall of the Bronze Statue, just at the very instant when Father Cyprian, her ravisher, her persecutor, and the human being whom on earth she hated the most, was examining the interior of the colossal image. All her aspirations of vengeance were suddenly transferred from Zitzka and Angela to the Carthusian priest; and when that ferocious craving was appeased by the awful death to which her hands consigned the miscreant ecclesiastic, a tremendous reaction took place in her soul; her better nature asserted its empire; and she looked with abhorrence upon the diabolical intentions which she had so recently entertained with regard to her uncle and Angela Wildon.

Her escape from Altendorf Castle was effected at the peril of her life: but she felt that she would rather perish in the early glory of her beauty and her youthful vigor, than lose her liberty. Hastening to rejoin her handmaidens, she departed with them precipitately from that neighborhood, and in a few days quitted Bohemia. Assuming the sable garb of penitence, she wandered over Europe, attended by the faithful Linda and Beatrice; until the tidings of the marriage and the coronation of the imperial Albert and the beauteous Angela reached her ears and determined her to pay them a final visit at Aix-la-Chapelle.

The particulars of that interview have been recorded; and at the conclusion the lovely Gloria Ildegardo departed alone, unattended, and in tears!

Where shall we find her next?—whither did her wanderings lead her?—and what destiny was now in store for her?

Reader, think not that we shall drop the curtain upon the scene without representing all that remains to be shown of the romantic career of the Daughter of Glory!

CHAPTER CVI.

CONCLUSION.

Our task is drawing to a close: little remains for us now to place upon record. A few observations will suffice to dispose of the principal characters who have figured upon the stage of this narrative; and such curiosity as we may have succeeded in exciting on the part of the reader, will then be appeased.

We have seen the Castle of Altendorf fall into the hands of the mighty Zitzka; and we have likewise beholden the destruction of the Bronze Statue and the hideous machinery connected therewith. The head quarters of the Tribunal were thus broken up and their tremendous mysteries revealed to the view of a horrified and indignant na-

tion. The moment the tidings were received at Prague, the inmates of Hamelen Castle and the White Mansion abandoned their luxurious dwellings and fled in all directions, fearful of being overtaken by the consequences of the exposure which had occurred at Altendorf, and which they naturally expected to be followed by a complete unveiling of the whole system. The various individuals throughout the country whose connection with the Tribunal was in any way suspected, were compelled to fly into foreign lands; and those who had managed to keep safely and securely their complicity in the widely ramified organization, felt no desire to adopt any measures to save the hideous institution from immediate extinction. The tremendous Tribunal perished, therefore, all in a moment: but oral traditions of its appalling deeds have descended to the present time, and may be gleaned here and there not only in Bohemia, but likewise in many parts of Germany.

The Baron of Altendorf, on his removal to the Castle of Prague, fell into a species of premature anility or childishness, the only lucid intervals of which were characterized by lamentable ravings on behalf of his dead son. At the expiration of about a year from his downfall he was seized with a mortal illness; the general breaking up of a constitution once vigorous and apparently impregnable to disease; then, in his last hours, he was assailed by a horrible delirium—frightful visions of the Bronze Statue haunting his imagination and filling his soul with the most rending terrors. As the supreme moment drew near, his distorted fancy lead him to believe that he himself had become a victim to the appalling tortures to which he had doomed so many in his time, but the engine of which had now in reality ceased to exist. His death was awful in the extreme. The most agonizing writhings convulsed his frame; and the dominant idea was that he endured *in imagination* agonies as intense, as rending, and as poignant as those which his victims had suffered in *reality;* and it was in the midst of the most frightful contortions of countenance and body, and the most shocking lamentations thrilling from his tongue, that the unhappy man surrendered up his spirit to the judgment seat of the Eternal!

Shortly after the visit of Gloria Ildegardo to Aix-la-Chapelle, the marriage of Count Lionel Arlon with the beauteous Linda, and that of the Baron Konrad de Pirna with her equally charming sister Beatrice, were celebrated in the chapel of the imperial palace, the Emperor and Empress of Germany assisting at the ceremony. Both Lionel and Konrad, with their lovely wives, remained attached to the court; they lived to a good old age, their existence passing in the sunshine of an unvaried prosperity; and when they went down into the tomb, they left a numerous offspring to deplore their loss and inherit their wealth and honors.

The emperor and empress were likewise blessed with sons and daughters, the former of whom bore the stamp of their sire's manly beauty, and the latter the impress of their mother's rare loveliness. They were reared in the admiration and practice of every virtue; and when the mighty Albert and the amiable Angela were called upon to pay the debt of nature, at a good old age, and within a few months of each other, they closed their eyes in peace, surrounded by the children and grandchildren to whom they bequeathed not only their imperial honors, but likewise the more brilliant heritage of their own good examples.

The venerable Bernard lived to a patriarchal age; and often, as he dandled the children of the emperor and empress upon his knees, he would think of those times when the former lay ill and suffering in the turret chamber of Ildegardo Castle, and when the latter ministered with angelic kindness to the invalid. Then, as the old man's heart grew full and his eyes filled with joyous tears, he would say within himself,—'There assuredly is a reward for virtue in this world;' and his pious belief was strengthened day by day as he contemplated the profound love, the sincere devotion, and the unalterable tenderness which united the hearts and constituted the happiness of the imperial Albert and his charming Angela.

Hubert, the ancient steward of Altendorf Castle, was another who recognized the hand of Providence in the history of the past, and the prosperity of the present. He remained in the imperial service until his death, holding the proud position of Governor of the Palace, and enjoying not only the confidence, but likewise the friendship of the emperor and empress.

To the Wildons Angela conducted herself as affectionately as if she were

in reality their own child. Neither in public nor in private would she permit them to display any ceremonial homage towards herself: but she treated them with a marked love and deference which not only testified the excellence of her disposition, and the warmth of her generous soul, but also constituted the most touching proof of gratitude which she could possibly display towards the guardians of her former years.

The Count de Rosenberg fixed his residence permanently at Aix-la-Chapelle, in order that he might be near the niece whom he loved so tenderly; not because she had risen to an imperial rank and sate upon the mightiest throne of Christendom—but because she was amiable, and generous, and good, and because she was the offspring of his lamented sister, the hapless Ermenonda!

And what of the great Zitzka? For a few years did this republican hero maintain the Taborite dominion in Bohemia; and his constant study was to establish the rights and consolidate the interests of the industrious millions.—Had he possessed councillors who were as able as they were honest, and as talented as they were well-intentioned, there can be no doubt that John Zitzka would have laid the foundation of a true social and democratic republic.—He understood the principles thereof in theory, and labored hard to reduce them to practice; but as we have before stated he shone rather as a warrior than a statesman, and his own intellectual deficiences were not supplied by the genius of effective advisers. Moreover, the rule of the Taborite chieftain was frequently disturbed by the hostile demonstrations made by other countries against the republican government of Bohemia; and although Zitzka invariably defeated his enemies, and chastised them signally for their audacity, yet the constant recurrence of war's exciting circumstances proved inimical to the complete carrying out of those grand political and social reforms which constituted the Taborite profession of faith.

Amongst the most formidable of the demonstrations made by foreign powers against the Bohemian Republic, was the campaign undertaken by the Silesians. These invaders, amounting so upwards of thirty thousand well armed and admirably disciplined men, poured into Bohemia with the fury of a swollen river that had burst its embankments. The frontier castles were all taken, despite the valorous resistance made by the Taborite garrisons; and the Silesians, flushed by their success, began to advance by rapid marches towards Prague. But John Zitzka was soon on the road to meet them; and even before the two armies came in sight of each other, the approach of the formidable Taborite chief struck such terror into the hearts of the Silesians that they threw themselves into the Castle of Raby, rather than hazard a pitched battle with the Bohemians. Zitzka laid siege to that stronghold; and in leading his troops to the assault, he was struck in his sound eye by the splinter of a tree shivered by a cannon ball. Though thus reduced to total blindness, he continued to head the escalading party, guided by his page, and fighting with a valor more desperate, if possible, than ever. His person seemed invulnerable, his arm invincible. As the sickle of the reaper is to the ripe corn field, so was the sword of the Taborite hero to the ranks of the enemy. The Silesians were beaten back from every point, the Castle of Raby was rescued from them, and their commander was forced to purchase conditions of peace upon the terms which John Zitzka chose to dictate.

Tranquillity being restored, the Captain General returned in triumph to Prague; and, notwithstanding his blindness, he devoted himself with unabated ardor and zeal to the work of political and social regeneration which he had undertaken. But the peace of Bohemia was again disturbed by the hostile attitude of the Cumans and Servians; and Zitzka, once more placing himself at the head of his Taborite heroes, went forth to the war. He now rode in a chariot, before which the immense banner of Mount Tabor was borne by eight standard-bearers; but no sooner did his army come within sight of the enemy, than Zitzka descended from the vehicle, mounted his horse, and galloped onward at the head of his troops. At first the Cumans and Servians fought with a resolute valor; but the spectacle of that blind hero, thundering down upon them on his colossal war steed, and attacking them with a fury which in itself was irresistible, produced such an universal terror that they gave way and fled in all directions. The triumph of Zitzka was complete; and he once more returned to Prague, covered with glory.

He now, upon some pretence, under-

took a journey towards that point of the frontier which was nearest to the city of Aix-la-Chapelle; ann there he met his daughter and her imperial husband, who had journeyed thither in the strictest privacy to enjoy the pleasure of this interview. The encounter was affecting from many circumstances, not only because it awoke in the mind of the father and daughter many and touching reminiscences concerning the ill-fated and lamented Ermenonda; but also because they both experienced a presentiment that this meeting would be their last. Nor less did Angela weep when she beheld her father in that state of physical darkness to which the accidents of war had reduced him; and her sorrow on this account was the greater inasmuch as the high and responsible position which her parent occupied in Bohemia prevented him from passing the remainder of his existence within the range of that tender devotedness and filial ministration which she would so cheerfully have exercised towards him.

The Taborite hero failed not to express his gratitude to the Emperor Albert for all the proofs of love and affection which he had lavished upon Angela; and then they separated, the imperial couple to Aix-la-Chapelle, and the Captain General hastening back to Prague. There he received the intelligence respecting his niece, the beautiful and well-beloved, but impetuous and self-willed Gloria; and, if he could not altogether approve of the destiny which she had now accepted, he was at all events relieved from any care relative to her future prospects in this life. He accordingly transmitted to her a letter full of affectionate assurances; and the response which he received in due course was well calculated to convince him that his niece, though at times swayed by the influences of an extraordinary character and a wildly romantic disposition, was nevertheless endowed with a good heart and a generous nature.

The peace of Bohemia being again threatened, by a hostile demonstration on the part of the Moravians, the blind warrior once more took the field at the head of the old guards who had so often fought, bled, and conquered beneath his banner. At the approach of the Taborite army the Moravian troops flung down their weapons and begged for mercy—a boon which the generous Zitzka hesitated not to accord. Peace was, therefore, re-established; and the Captain General was returning to Prague, when he was seized with a sudden illness, which proved fatal in a few hours. The last words to which his lips gave utterance were these:

'The cause of political, religious, and social reformation will now be struck down for a season. The religious aspect of the question will be the first to display itself again and recover its vitality; then the political phase will reappear; and lastly, the social division of the great work which I have initiated, will engage the attention of the world. Meseems that the future unveils its mysteries to my mental vision; and I can look far, far along the vista of unborn years, through the avenue of coming centuries! And, oh! glorious is the spectacle of which heaven thus permits me to obtain a prophetic glimpse! Yes, I see it all—the future is indeed unfolded to me, I can read the pages of a history fore-written by the hand of an Almighty Destiny! And, oh! I thank Thee, thou Lord of Hosts, that thou hast thus deigned to reveal to me in this, my supreme hour, the future workings of thy sovereign will! For now, ere I surrender up my spirit unto Thee, O Lord, may I bequeath the legacy of ardent hope to the proletarian generations yet unborn! Despair not, then, ye sons and daughters of toil whom the despotic few hold bound in slavery and serfdom! the work of your regeneration may be slow, but it is sure; it may be impeded often, but its ultimate triumph is inevitable! Oh! how the power of prophecy grows stronger within me, my mind is lightened up with the effluence of heaven's own blessed lustre! I look on—on—into the depths of the coming time;—forward—forward—along the pathway as yet untrodden by either men or angels; far, far along the road which stretches from the Present through the yet unknown fields of the Future, into the vast gulf of Eternity which none save God can fathom! And now every thing grows clearer and clearer to my view; I seem to be lifted from the earth as it now is, and snatched from the midst of the present age; I am whirled onward by an invisible hand, I am hurried over the barriers of Time, into the middle of the Nineteenth Century—and, O joy! I behold crowns falling—thrones crumbling to pieces—sceptres snapping in twain—and the PEOPLE agitating throughout Christendom! Yes.

I see it all; the nations have risen, the proprietors have broken their chains; the day of retribution is come; and the slaves and the serfs of the World are asserting their right to its mastership! And the Lord fights for the People even as He was wont to fight for the Children of Israel! Myriads of angels, invisible to the battling proletarians, are descending to aid them against the tyrants; for the Almighty repudiates the miscreants who claim to rule under His Divine Will! On, on rolls the tide of progress—'tis a glorious flood—an ocean of living waves sweeping over the earth; and nought can withstand its power! Farewell, to Kings and Aristocracies—farewell forever! 'Tis done—the reign of despotism is over—the sceptre of tyranny is broken—the proletarian race exists no longer—but all are free, and all are equal!'

And with the glory of this prophetic vision still shining like a beatific halo around his soul, the Captain General of the Taborites surrendered up his breath forever.

Turn we now to a luxurious chamber in the Sultan's palace at Constantinople. Upon a pile of voluptuous cushions in this chamber reposes a female of ravishing beauty, apparelled in the graceful Turkish garb. Upon her head she wore an elegant turban. Her apparel was covered with precious stones— the worth of a dozen monarchs' ransom was scattered, in the form of diamonds, over her bewitching dress.

But who was this being of such transcendant loveliness? She was the charming and well-beloved Sultana of the mighty Sovereign of the Turkish empire—the adored and cherished one, for whose sake the young, handsome, and chivalrous Sultan had put away all other wives, and discarded all his concubines. Her influence over him was boundless, and she used it to good ends and admirable purposes. The ministers viewed not her power with jealousy; and the people, from one end of the Ottoman dominions to the other, blessed her name.

For twenty years did she enact the part of a beneficent genius towards the great Moslem empire: for twenty years did she maintain her influence over her imperial husband, the Sultan. And as unimpaired as that influence continued the glory of her beauty,—a beauty too exquisite for even the ruthless destroyer Time to lay his blighting, withering hand upon a single feature! But as so faultless a monument of Nature's sculpturing was too fair to be witnessed in its decay, Death bore it from the scene of its triumph ere a single lineament was marred or changed. Thus the impression which the wondrous beauty of that woman made upon the age in which she lived, was depreciated by none less glowing—less vivid—less romantic!

In her forty-second year did she bid farewell to this life; and the Sultan, who long remained inconsolable for her loss, built a sumptuous tomb to her memory. Her death was deemed a national calamity, even in a country where Woman is looked upon as the slave of man's pleasures, rather than as the grace, the ornament, and the comfort of his household.

But once again we hear the reader asking who this illustrious Empress of the Ottomans might have been?

Upon her tomb at Constantinople was inscribed the name of the Sultana Zuliema: but in her earlier years she was known in Bohemia as Gloria Ildegardo!

THE END.

McGILL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
YF .9F44
515290 V.1
NOT FOR GENERAL CIRCULATION
* PR5221
R35B7
1850
BHG99H6